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A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

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by **JAMES E. GUNN**

ALSO:
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Vol. 33, No. 3

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

FALL, 1955

A Complete Novel

THE NAKED SKY James E. Gunn 10

The city was full of people—but the man from Venus and a girl from the ruins were the last two living creatures

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Sarith headed for Chalce on a psychiatric mission—and got lost on a wild, backward planet known as the Earth!

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Sky"

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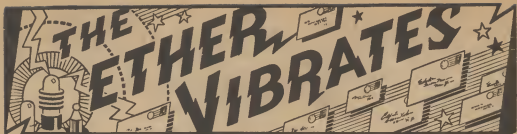
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The ABC's of
SERVICING

How to Be a
Success
in RADIO-
TELEVISION



A Science Fiction Department Featuring Letters From Readers

WE GENERALLY open this column with an editorial concerning either the issue or science. Sometimes both. But this time we're departing from established procedure. We're going to open with a letter we received early in June. We won't comment upon it except to explain certain points that the letter itself doesn't make clear.

Because my son Dick enjoyed your magazine so much and contributed so regularly to the columns of readers' correspondence, I know that he would want me to send you the enclosed clipping.

I know that you will agree that it is a fine thing for science fiction that the Harvard University Library is taking his collection and expanding it into an important and permanent part of its acquisitions in the area of "the world of the future."

The enclosed clipping will explain why you, and through you your many readers, have not heard from Dick since last fall.

Very truly yours,

Paul S. Clarkson

P.S. Dick died of Ewing's Sarcoma on December 13th, 1954. He was as always, brave and brilliant to the end. If you ever met him at the SF conventions, you know what I mean—a wonderful boy!

That's the letter. The newspaper clipping Mr. Clarkson enclosed was from the Baltimore Sun, April 17, 1955. It explained that Dick Clarkson was a brilliant Harvard student who died of cancer at the age of 19. It went on to state that Dick was an avid science fiction fan who collected back issues of SF magazines extensively. He was also co-founder (at the age of 16) and first president of the Baltimore Science Fiction Forum. He turned down a Ford Foundation offer to start college at 15, and was regularly on the dean's list at Harvard.

Now we quote from the article. "Dick Clarkson's science fiction collection will be arrayed, one day soon, on the shelves of the Harvard University Library. It won't

be just one more amorphous addition, either, to the oldest and third largest library in this country. Instead, this is to be the nucleus of the first distinct science fiction section in a major American library."

Later the article states, "Accordingly, to capitalize on its head start, Harvard now informally invites friends of Dick Clarkson and of SF in general to deposit with it such books and magazines in this field as they can spare or would like to see preserved."

The article ends with this paragraph. "His (Dick's) father, Paul Clarkson, a book collector in many learned categories, used to offer witty disparagement of Dick's chosen field. Now, however, boxing up some hundreds of books and magazines (SF) for the dignity of their final repository, he is a proud man."

We at *Startling Stories* feel science fiction fans should know of the Harvard Library collection. We feel fans should know of Dick. We feel they should know that some day, in that future world that Dick and the rest of science fiction fandom dream of, there will be no death of cancer at the age of 19.

ETHERGRAMS

HEP GRANDMA

by Rory Magill Faulkner

Dear Editor: Since the departure of Sam Mines, I see the editor has lapsed into anonymity, as was the case for many years when Sam Merwin ran the joint. I wish you would come out from behind the mulberry bush and let us know who you are!

About this combo—all three magazines in one—well, I dunno. If you put out one large mag, or at

(Continued on Page 8)



THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

*You Can Influence Others
With Your Thinking!*

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a positive demonstration that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—get across to him or her your ideas? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be intentionally, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have

privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

This Free Book Points Out the Way

The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) invite you to explore the powers of your mind. Their sensible, simple suggestions have caused intelligent men and women to soar to new heights of accomplishment. They will show you how to use your natural forces and talents to do things you now think are beyond your ability. Use the coupon below and send for a copy of the fascinating sealed free book, "The Mastery of Life," which explains how you may receive this unique wisdom and benefit by its application to your daily affairs.

The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)

Scribe O.X.M., The Rosicrucians, AMORC,
Rosicrucian Park, San Jose, California.

Kindly send me a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." I am interested in learning how I may receive instructions about the full use of my natural powers.

Name.....

Address.....State.....

least came out every month, it might be O.K. But one magazine every three months—isn't that spreading it out pretty thin? Is this a sign of the decline and fall of science fiction? I hope not, for what am I going to read then? I don't like slick magazines, love stories, and am fed to the teeth with murder mysteries. In sheer self defense I have gone back to the beginning of my SF collection and have been reading the old ones over again.

I noticed that SS reached its peak in 1952. In that year there were more really good stories than in all the issues before and since. ASF was getting dull about that time, and Galaxy was beginning to be obsessed with those stories that read like Cappy Ricks on the moon, or like Earthworm tractor salesmen on Mars. I don't particularly care for my science fiction mixed with sociology, advertising men or sports. It loses some of its wonder and does nothing for the imagination. So SS was tops for that year.

Have just finished the Spring '55 SS. Bryce Walton has a very good fresh theme for his yarn. Bryce is getting to be a really top notch writer. Will you give him my regards and my compliments, please, sir? I knew him when he lived in Los Angeles, and am glad to see him writing so well now. Not that he wasn't good then—his stories were always original and different. I wonder if he has hit on a real trend? The reason is, I had a good going over by my doctor last month, the first one in 20 years, and he gave me at least 40 years more to live. Since I am now 66, it seems likely I'll get my wish to see the space station launched, and the first moon flight. I hope I can last out till they hit Mars, too! Also, I'd like to see Halley's comet again. I remember it well from 1910.

Porges' THE BOX made me roar. You see, I work in porcelain pottery, and we have had a lot of experience with sending out ware parcel post and marked "Fragile." It happens every time! Smash!

The other stories were the kind you forget. WAYFARER was the best of these. As for the article, being a dumb female, I can't go for articles with a lot of those equations in them—me, who has to take off her shoes to count above ten. I still don't know what Mr. Gunther is trying to prove—and to be truthful, I don't much care!

In the Winter SS, I thought the best story was MORE STATELY MANSIONS. Young writes from the heart, not from the head or a text book. Poul Anderson has done a lot better than the one in this issue. I never could get into THE SNOWS OF GANYMEDE. I was very interested in his Future History, but think Heinlein has done it much better. Too much sociological stuff in this story for me. I like 'em more human—and I don't mean love stories, either. I wish you could get hold of James Schmitz, and persuade him to do you some more of those "Agent of Vega" space stories he had in ASF. Jim has a wonderful sense of mordant humor, and it lives up his yarns no end.

Heard a good definition of science fiction on a radio program some time ago. "Science Fiction is sort of a wild child begotten by Imagination upon the body of Technology." Good, what?

You are letting the letter column get too in-

volved. Cut out those long technical and religious arguments among the learned Drs. Not that I would go back to Sarge Saturn and Xeno and Goshoboy-o-boy! But, surely, there is a middle road—let some of us plain dumb fans have our say, too.

You, sir, Mr. Anonymous, have it in your power to bring this old favorite *Startling Stories* out of its recent slump. More power to you in doing it, and I'll be pulling for you. And please—come out, come out, whoever you are!—164 Geneva Place, Covina, California.

Bryce Walton is a very good friend of ours, so we'll be sure to give him your best regards. As for the space operas, I'm afraid that far too few readers want to see them—not nearly enough, anyway, to make a magazine get out of the red. As to your comment on the religious-technical feuds—we're being very firm on that. No more of it—period! It's bored too many of us to tears for too long a time.

In fact, we announced that decision in our Summer issue, and received a caustic letter from the Rev. E. M. Moorehead, who was given much space in previous columns for his arguments on the side of religion. The Rev. bids us farewell, and says he'll never read our magazine again because we've cut out his pet topic. This seems to indicate that the Rev. was never really a science fiction fan, and that he was using our letter column for missionary purposes. We'd like to go into the ethics involved—but we won't.

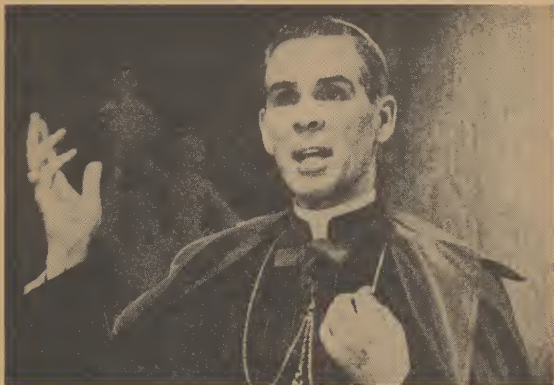
AGITATED MISS

by Diane Tenglin

Dear Editor: I have a good question for you to answer. Why did you do it? I mean cross SS with TWS with FSM with who knows what else to get a hybrid monster like this thing I picked up on the newstand (Spring *Startling Stories*) with the aging turkey gobble on the front and that gosh-awful title. Can't you afford to buy stories enough to fill up the other two? Aren't people buying your mags? Why? Why? I can't stand it! I'll have nothing at all to read and I may have to turn to something as low and vile as *studying*!

On to more serious things. Being a woman, I don't believe the lead story in the Spring *Startling Stories* is possible, realistic, intelligent, well-thought-out, or even worth reading. Not because I'm defending myself, but because I have had, I think, considerably more contact with women than the author, and that type of woman does not predominate. Also, women do not live longer just because they don't work as hard, as most men seem to think. Many women work just as hard as many men. Women, and this may or may not surprise you, are built differently than

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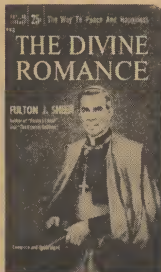
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An Inspiring New Pocket-Size Book*

THE DIVINE ROMANCE

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I'LL CRY TOMORROW**

by Lillian Roth

(with Mike Connolly and Gerold Frank)

Winner of The Christopher Award

This inspirational story of the famed actress' dramatic comeback will be published by POPULAR LIBRARY in October, 1955.



The Naked Sky

A Novel by JAMES E. GUNN

I

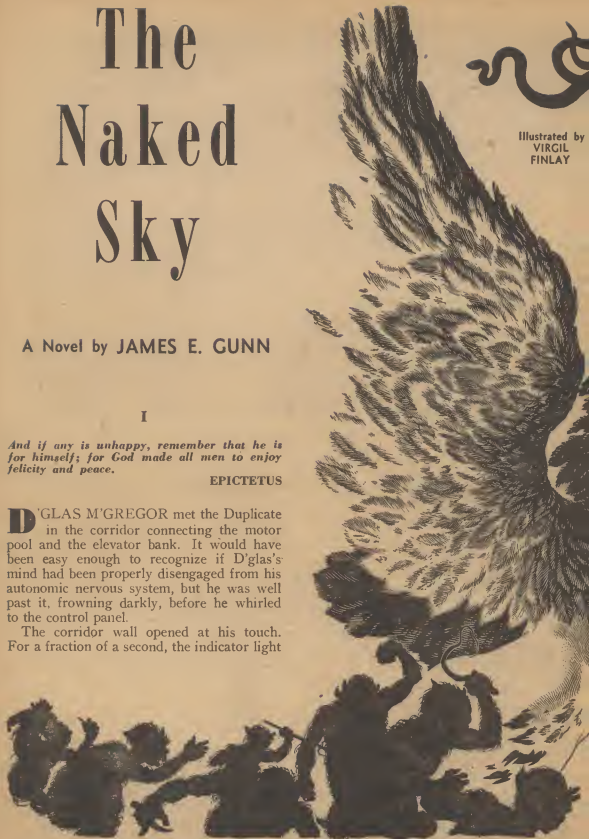
And if any is unhappy, remember that he is for himself; for God made all men to enjoy felicity and peace.

EPICETUS

D'GLAS M'GREGOR met the Duplicate in the corridor connecting the motor pool and the elevator bank. It would have been easy enough to recognize if D'glas's mind had been properly disengaged from his autonomic nervous system, but he was well past it, frowning darkly, before he whirled to the control panel.

The corridor wall opened at his touch. For a fraction of a second, the indicator light

Illustrated by
VIRGIL
FINLAY





The city was full of people . . . but the man from Venus and the girl from the ruins were the last living creatures on Earth. . .

behind it was steady. Then the Duplicate began to move at a speed of 200 kilometers an hour.

D'glas's fingers blurred as they flashed to the controls. The far panel dropped, cutting off the Duplicate from the motor pool and the surface of Venus. Instantly, it reversed directions. It was moving back toward D'glas at the same incredible speed when the second panel dropped.

For a moment the indicator stood still, burning brightly. Then it was off.

D'glas sighed. The trap had failed again. . . .

The rain was falling on Venus in great sheets; fierce gusts of wind hurled drops with bullet force. The rain had been falling for fifty years. It would fall for fifty more before it began to slacken.

By then there would be seas and lakes and ponds where free water had never existed. Cleansed by fire of its deadly ingredients of carbon dioxide and formaldehyde, breathable for the first time with free oxygen, the atmosphere would be completely changed.

And one day the clouds would break up, and the sun would shine down upon a Venus unveiled, a world transformed by Man.

Venus had been stillborn. Almost a twin of Earth, it had been embalmed at birth, shrouded in stifling clouds of formaldehyde and its polymers.

Beneath those miles of plastic clouds, Man found a desert where nothing lived, where nothing could live. The vital ingredients were missing: free water, free oxygen.

The colonists dug deep beneath the surface to escape the vicious thermodynamic forces of the atmosphere, and then they set methodically about the task of changing a world.

Sponge platinum supplied the catalytic action. Venus itself supplied the power. Every lightning bolt released water and fertilizing nitrates upon the land. And Man himself was busy in great, lumbering combines which crawled the desert, chewing up sand and stone and leaving behind, to soak up the rain, soil rich with fertilizers, long-chain proteins, genetically designed micro-organisms, earthworms, and seed.

In spots that grew steadily, Venus began to assume a second veil, a veil that lived, a

veil of green. And the grasses and plants and trees took carbon dioxide from the air, bound the carbon into their stalks and trunks and leaves, and released free oxygen to the atmosphere.

It took Man four hundred years to conquer the relatively benign North American continent. In less than half that time he would change Venus's alien, poisonous nature. Already he had tamed her, sweetened her breath, softened her hard bosom. Now he was making her fertile.

In another fifty years she would be as fair as Earth.

DRIVEN raindrops swirled suddenly against the lens above. In the room below, the scene blurred; rain seemed to stream down the repeater window. As it cleared, a long, blinding chain of lightning danced along the horizon.

Perry closed his eyes. "So near," he murmured. "And yet so far. All right, D'glas, wake up."

"I'm awake," D'glas said. "You've got the story?" He straightened up in the diagnostic chair, rubbing his arm where the hypodermic jet had irritated the skin.

Perry was seventy years old, and his middle-aged face had settled into wise, tolerant lines and creases. But now it was troubled. "There's no doubt. It was a Duplicate. Guy Reeder, the lay hedonist, was on a combine at the time."

"That's how I recognized it. I had just left him—"

"We know," Brian broke in, motioning at the chair with the mouthpiece of his pacifier in a gesture that summed up the whole, subconscious interrogatory. He was a few years younger than Perry and perhaps a few years less patient. He pointed the pacifier at D'glas. "And in a foul temper you left him. Which is why you were almost too late in recognizing the Duplicate. Boy, you need treatment."

Besides D'glas, there were three of them in the room. Perry, Brian, and Floyd—as dissimilar as three men can be, but hedonists all. What government there was on Venus existed here. Whatever these men decided in their wisdom, would be the concurrent decision of three million colonists.

Three hedonists, and D'glas. He felt outnumbered and alone.

"I was angry, I admit," he said grudgingly.

ingly. "To me the combine work is boring and unrewarding. And when Guy tried to convince me that this was modification of reality in the hedonic sense, I quit and came back."

"What could be greater modification?" Floyd asked quietly from the corner, his dark face shadowed and anonymous.

"To apply it here is casuistry," D'glas flashed back. "Our work is drudgery, not pleasure."

"Happines comes from inside," Brian said soberly. "What hedonics gives us is the techniques with which to make necessity a virtue, with which to make the un-

be conceded the ultimate right to outlaw those emotions which are destructive of the society itself. An unhappy man is a deadly focus of social disintegration."

It was, D'glas thought, a significant comment on this society that in the middle of the most desperate struggle of its existence it could concern itself with the hedonic condition of a single citizen.

"We have assumed," Perry continued, "that the Duplicates were a threat. The threat has become imminent. If we learn anything from this incident, it is this: the Duplicates are telepathic. Let's re-examine the film."

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION—

MAN'S quest for happiness has been constant since his emergence from primeval slime. In fact, it is a truism to state that man searches for happiness—of course he does! Every living thing searches for happiness, whether it be in the form of a warm ray of sunshine, a full manger of hay, or a half-dozen martinis while in the company of a member of the opposite sex. But James E. Gunn shows us that even this most basic of all human drives can be carried too far. In *THE NAKED SKY*, which further develops the hedonistic theme of his previous novel, "Name Your Pleasure," he presents us with an Earth that is completely happy. All our billions of people are happy—with the exception of two. And that poses the question: What price happiness?

Robert F. Young's *JUNGLE DOCTOR* is a novelet of extreme delicacy and sensitivity. In fact, parts of it read closer to poetry than prose. We think you'll find it smooth, impressive fiction.

Our short stories are headed by a Margaret St. Clair chiller, a Bryce Walton intellectual gambit and a Mack Reynolds mood piece. More good science fiction, too, in a full issue that we know you will enjoy.

—The Editor

avoidable a pleasure. "What cannot be endured must be endured, and what must be endured should be enjoyed."

"When rape becomes inevitable—" D'glas growled. "I'll quote Morgan to you verse by verse. I know what he brought us from Earth a Century ago. But your hedonism is little different from my stoicism. There should be more for Man than grubbing in the dirt."

"I would like to point out," Perry said quietly, "that the decision is not whether we should or should not grub in the dirt, but whether we will be permitted to do so if we wish."

As quickly as it had come, D'glas's anger ebbed. This was a good society. There had never been a better. A man had a right to do anything he wished, to be anything he wished—except unhappy. And society must

Perry pressed the side of the window frame. Within it, the surface of Venus vanished, replaced by a dim corridor. A man was walking away from them. As they watched him, the man, without a backward glance, began to run.

"You had just opened the control panel," Perry said.

The Duplicate did not begin clumsily, as men do, building up momentum. It started at high speed, its legs churning like pistons, blurring even on the high-speed film. Ahead, a panel fell, closing the end of the corridor.

WITHOUT hesitation the Duplicate jumped, landing with both feet against the panel, absorbing momentum with bending knees. When they snapped back, they propelled the Duplicate back the way it

had come, its legs flashing before they touched the floor. Now they could see its face.

It was the Duplicate of Guy Reeder.

The second panel dropped, completing the fourth wall of the cell. The camera shifted. They were inside the cell with the Duplicate. For an instant it stood frozen. The next moment the only trace of it was a cloud of disintegrating particles.

"That," Perry sighed, "was taken at a speed of one million frames a second."

"Same spectroscopic analysis?"

"Exactly," Floyd said quietly. "It is not human. There is, generally, a higher percentage of metal in the Duplicate."

Perry returned the window to its view of the rain-swept plains of Venus. "The first one was reported two days ago—almost five hundred hours. This is the fifth one. We have trapped two. Both instantly blew themselves into their constituent atoms. There must be others among us which have not been detected."

Brian removed the pacifier from his mouth. "Too soon. We are not ready for contact with aliens."

"Aliens? You're sure?" D'glas asked quickly.

Brian shrugged. "Their abilities aren't human."

"The percentage of metal suggests that they are mechs," Floyd added. "And the self-destruction, too. There may be alien races which can blow themselves to pieces at will, but I doubt it."

"A humanoid mech?" D'glas said, puzzled. "Why?"

"To pass among us unsuspected," Perry said.

"What for? They haven't done anything."

"So far. Perhaps. In our society it is difficult to know when changes occur. At this moment we are under observation."

Brian and Floyd nodded.

"What the next stage will be," Perry answered calmly, "is impossible to guess, but it will not be favorable to a continuation of our society and of our way of life."

Again the hedonists nodded.

"What are we going to do, then?" D'glas demanded, his dark, young face scowling.

"The first thing," Perry said, without changing inflection, "is to make certain we all are human."

While he was speaking, the partitions were falling. Hedonic reflexes brought D'glas out of the diagnostic chair without hesitation, but it was too late. Already he was locked into a small metal room. It vibrated briefly.

Before he could sit down again, the partitions rose silently. Perry and Brian were looking at the corner where Floyd had been sitting. It was empty. The chair had disappeared. So had the rubberized flooring down to the steel beneath. The wall was scorched and black.

"They are determined," Perry said grimly, "that we shall not examine one. . . ."

BRIAN sucked on the pacifier reflectively before he removed it. "Did you expect this?"

"No," Perry admitted. "It was a precaution. To be truthful, I suspected you, Brian, if anyone. Your dependence on that pacifier seemed a little excessive."

"It's a small crutch which seems to be emotionally helpful in these troubled times," Brian said calmly. "In more plentiful times, I think I would have smoked tobacco in a pipe."

"And are the rest of us human?" D'glas asked.

"That's what the X-rays indicate."

Brian got up lazily. "You don't mind if I check on you, do you, Perry?"

Perry smiled ruefully. "Not at all." He made room for Brian behind the desk. "It is unfortunate that Floyd's Duplicate didn't give us time to get a picture of its insides. But how can you trap a telepath?"

Brian studied the desk top, nodded, and moved back to his chair. "What about Floyd?"

"He's on his way here now—not that there's much we can do."

"Are we going to let them roam among us at will?" D'glas demanded. "Who knows what they may be planning?"

"Exactly," Brian said. "And so we cannot weigh the risk of preparing for it. Perhaps we could set up X-ray equipment in deserted corridors—deserted, of course, because the threat implicit is not yet dangerous enough to risk the death or injury of the general citizen."

"Beyond that," Perry said soberly, "we cannot go without losing that freedom of action and choice which is an integral part

of our society. When the measures for the preservation of our society must, in themselves, destroy it, we must choose inaction."

Brian agreed gravely. "Wait and see. I am confident that hedonics can meet the test without additional preparation."

"Then we are going to do nothing?" D'glas exclaimed impatiently.

"As a group, yes," Perry said, unmoved. "As individuals, no. Each of us must act as his intellect and desires direct. That is the basis for our society, and it must so remain. But it would be desirable to warn the other colonies of our danger and ask their advice and help."

"We haven't heard from Ganymede and Callisto for a hundred years, from Mars for seventy-five," D'glas pointed out. "If they were going concerns, they would have contacted us by now."

"**H**AVE we contacted them?" Brian asked quietly. "Their job was more difficult than ours. We had only to change our atmosphere; they had to manufacture theirs. And yet even our society has been lean; we've had no fat for interplanetary jaunts."

"It was hedonics that brought us through," Perry added. "And we got hedonics only by accident. The original colonies had little use for such frivolities; it was equated with the over-sensualism and overstimulation the colonists fled from. Morgan himself, who did so much to make applied hedonics a true science and then saw it perverted beyond control, came to Venus as a physician and teacher, not a hedonist. There are not many men like Morgan. Perhaps the other colonies were not so lucky."

"And perhaps the aliens conquered them first," D'glas said gloomily. "What about Earth?"

"Earth, too," Brian said, "although the case is not quite the same. Earth was never lean, and yet we lost touch with Earth fifty years ago. She may be conquered. She may need help. It may even be possible that she can help us. I think some of us must make the effort."

"We have scavenged parts enough for four complete ships," Perry said. "One for each colony and one for Earth. After that there is no more, and it is questionable whether any of these will reach their desti-

nations safely. But I think there will be volunteers."

"The Earth flight," D'glas heard himself saying. "I'll take it."

"Very well," Perry accepted gravely. "I wish you luck and happiness—for yourself and us."

D'glas didn't answer. He was stunned by what he had done. This is what the hedonite had wanted. Skillfully, they had worked him into risking himself on a wild and unpromising errand. Now it was too late to back out.

And yet, he felt a warm backlash of emotional release. For the first time he really understood the meaning of the word "voluntary." The job was there to be done. It should be done. Someone had to do it. He, D'glas M'Gregor, who was not happy to grub in the dirt, was nevertheless the logical choice.

The result was pleasure. It was the hedonic reflex.

"Can you fly the ship?" Brian asked softly.

"I think so," D'glas said confidently. "I've done more complicated things in the exercises."

"That was true. The hedonic training program developed muscular, sensory, and nervous discrimination and coordination side by side with mental agility and the all-important psychological control. It was complete."

"Good," Perry said. "You can start tomorrow. We have absolutely no time to waste."

"Less than that," Floyd said from the doorway.

It was the real Floyd this time. Perry confirmed it by a glance at his desk.

"We're beginning to lose people," Floyd said quietly. "An accurate count is impossible in our society, but by my estimate more than one thousand persons have disappeared in the last two days."

"Where have they gone?" exclaimed D'glas.

Floyd shrugged. "Venus is a big world, and three million people don't make much impression on it. My guess is that the missing people are in the ships that brought the aliens—hidden underground, perhaps, in the boiling tropics. What worries me: have their places been taken by things that aren't human?"

II

*O happiness! our being's end and aim!
Good, pleasure, ease, content! whate'er thy
name:*

*That something still which prompts the eter-
nal sigh,*

For which we bear to live, or dare to die.

ALEXANDER POPE

IT WAS a rocky landing, but a good one. Any landing a man can walk away from is a good one. D'glas walked away from this one.

The ship was not irreparably damaged. New first and second stages, another load of fuel, and he might even be able to nurse it back to Venus.

He didn't worry about it. Ships stood tall all over the vast landing field, rusty missiles reaching high, aimed at the cloudless sky above. They hadn't flown for many years, but among them all there must be parts and equipment good for one more ship.

More important, he didn't want to consider the return trip. Not yet. The memory of the long, lonely voyage from Venus was still too fresh. Only his hedonic training had saved him from madness.

Now he stood with his two feet on the Earth and shivered. Earth was a mother no more.

Weight was on him again, feeling heavy and strange after the long weightlessness of the trip, and the air smelled flat and tasteless without the omnipresent odor of formaldehyde, and he was trapped between the concrete-covered soil and the naked sky, blue-clear and blazing.

It was horrible. It triggered subconscious and unsuspected reactions. He was afraid.

Ancient names that had almost passed out of the language of the Venusian colonists returned to him: agoraphobia, photophobia— He was exposed pitilessly upon a great plain; a giant eye stared down at him accusingly, watching, condemning. If he moved incautiously he might fall into the transparent blueness above, fall off the surface of the world into the terrible sky—

It was five minutes before he stopped shivering and the perspiration dried on his body. It took the hedonic exercises that long to re-emphasize the unity of mind and body, to damp the feedback of mind to

senses. It took that long for the mind to accept the testimony of the senses and construct logical patterns out of it.

No clouds. That explained the blue emptiness above. That burning eye was the sun. The only direction he could fall was down.

D'glas turned to an inspection of the field. It was deserted. More than that, abandoned. The concrete was cracked and uneven. Grass grew in long, green tracteries. A nearby sapling was taller than D'glas. It had already begun the mighty destruction it would complete in maturity.

The warehouses and control towers that lined the city-side of the field had been built to endure, no doubt, but they were showing signs of long neglect. Their sides were stained, their windows broken. One had lost a wall; its roof leaned precariously over the void.

OVER everything was a sensation of solitude, like an almost intangible brush of cobwebs across the face. There was no movement, anywhere. There was no one to move.

D'glas studied the field through narrowed eyes, but he could decipher no meaning from it. Not yet. The mystery was still as great as why the ships had suddenly stopped coming fifty years ago.

The landing field had belonged to the colonies. The whole interplanetary enterprise had been theirs. The Hedonic Council, Earth's ruling body, had been content to leave it so, seeing no useful purpose in risking its concept of hedonism in a risky attempt to bring the colonists under control.

And to the Council's mind, no doubt, the colonies had served a useful purpose as places to which those few criminal masochists who rejected the ultimate sensual pleasure might exile themselves.

That was what Morgan had written in his book: *The Rise and Fall of Applied Hedonics*.

What had happened, then, to the colonists who had worked the ships and run the field and operated the strip beyond?

D'glas frowned and went through the rusting ships nearby. When he emerged from the last of them, his frown was deeper.

Three of them had been unidentifiable.

Of the remaining four, one was from Calisto, one from Ganymede, and two from Mars. Why they had come, why they had not left again, and what had happened to the crews were questions the ships did not answer.

D'glas turned toward the distant spires of the City. They rose like supplicating hands against the horizon, and he wished he were a complete hedonist. Perhaps then he could banish the tight, cold feeling of uneasiness that straightened his shoulders and stiffened his spine.

But he wasn't. He couldn't. He would have to live with it until he could answer the questions the silent City posed.

It waited for him, motionless, dead. . . .

Cautiously, he moved through the semi-darkness of the building called Fun House, his senses alert. But there was nothing to set them off. No movement, no change, no sound.

Glass-doored booths lined both sides of the big room. They were empty. They were clean, too, dusted and scrubbed, the floors, the tables, the long, soft benches that were as wide as beds.

Idly he touched one of the dispensers that lined the wall above the table. White powder, dusted from it and powdered the table top. He picked up a few grains on the tip of his finger and tasted them gingerly. They were sweet with an edge of bitterness. He studied the labels on the dispensers:

NEO-HEROIN POWDER
NEO-HEROIN SYRETTE
SCOTCH BOURBON GIN KAFI

He touched the last one: a hot drop of liquid fell onto his palm. He tasted it. It was bitter. Coffee, all right. Not good coffee, but coffee.

It was a puzzle. As far as his investigation had taken him, the strip was deserted. He had seen no signs of habitation, no activity, since he had entered the building through the underpass.

There was no one in this place. And yet it was ready for customers who might find here their definition of fun. It was clean. Dispensers were full. If he had coins to slip into the indicated slots, he could have had coffee or one of the other drinks listed.

It was all ready. Where was everybody?

He turned toward the rear of the room. From the outside this had looked like a multi-storied building. Even if all the levels were as tall as this one, there should be five more above. But he had found no way to reach them.

Then he found it. Where, logically, stairs should have started, where banks of elevators should have waited, there was a wall. Bolted in the middle of it was a metal plaque in archaic but decipherable printing:

DO NOT DISTURB

All Rooms Occupied

Sealed this day: 3-7-05

by order of the Council

D'glas puzzled over it. Occupied by what? Goods? People? Bodies?

All choices seemed improbable. He rapped on the plastic with his knuckles. It was solid and thick. Too solid and too thick to struggle with now. That mystery would have to wait.

As he approached the front of the building, doors swung open eerily. So all-pervasive had been the atmosphere of desolation, he almost jumped. Photosensitive relays and automatic motors, he told himself.

BEYOND the entrance was a kind of arcade lined with machines. He studied them a moment. There were slots in them, obviously meant for coins. There were chutes from which something—possibly coins again—were returned. There they ceased to resemble each other. Some of the machines had handles, some levers, some no apparent means of control.

They were means, he decided, by which a person could wager coins against odds implicit in the machines or in the difficulties of controlling the gambler's own sensory or muscular system.

Coins, their use almost forgotten on Venus, seemed like very handy things to have on Earth. If he had a few, he might even return to that tap inside marked Kafi, whose dispensation, foul as it was, was still loaded with caffeine.

But wistful glances were a waste of time. He turned one of the machines around. Within five minutes he had solved the mystery of the rudimentary lock and picked it with the slender piece of wire which had kept half of his shirt-front neat and straight. Inside the machine, in a little box,

were two lonely coins.

He juggled them thoughtfully in his hand, weighing the convenience of the coins against the effort necessary to obtain them, and turned to a second machine. Two coins were little better than none, but it wasn't necessary to spend time extracting them from the coin boxes. He had a stake.

In the second machine, steel balls, released simultaneously from right and left-hand chutes, spiraled downward through mazes fraught with perils—holes through which they could drop and be lost. Electromagnets controlled by the player could guide the balls to safety and the jackpot at the bottom.

D'glas hit the jackpot with the first coin. Within ten minutes, he had milked every machine on that side of the arcade. None had many coins, but most had a few. As he turned away, he had a jacket pocket full of coins.

The games had been easy. Too easy. A ten-year-old child on Venus was expected to perform more difficult feats in his hedonic exercises.

Perhaps, he thought, they served as a come-on for the Fun House.

Thinking of the fun house made him thirsty. He could suppress it, but there was no need now that he had coins.

The transparent doors opened to welcome him back. As they closed behind him, the lights went out.

The darkness was total. Suddenly, frighteningly, he was back in the coasting spaceship, feeling again that terrible, weightless disorientation—

Then his hedonic reflexes acted, damped the false sensory impressions, calmed his baseless fears. He knew, theoretically, what caused the darkness. An interrupter was canceling the light that should have reached him with waves 180° out of phase.

The darkness chuckled, snickered, giggled, tittered, guffawed, roared—

Suddenly, where only darkness had been, there was a fantastic figure standing in front of him—a creature who was goat from his wicked little hooves up to the waist, and man from the waist up to his curly hair. Out of the dark hair, like twin reminders, peeked sharp little horns.

"Be happy, be joyful, be gay!" bubbled the satyr. "Life begins at the Fun House of the Three Worlds, where every pleas-

ure known to man has been brought to ecstatic perfection. What stimulation do your senses lack? Name it—and it's yours."

STUNNED, his senses shocked, his body temporarily out of control, D'glas staggered back. Abruptly, the satyr disappeared, the laughter cut off in mid peal. Light returned, and D'glas realized that the darkness, the satyr, and the laughter had been only a recording, a welcome to the entering customer.

Where were the customers?

D'glas turned and walked quickly out of the arcade into the street beyond. He could explain the darkness inside the fun-house entrance; he could explain the laughter and the satyr. But he had an unreasonable reluctance to press through the darkness and the laughter, to brush past the satyr, to reach a fun house from which the fun had disappeared.

The naked sky had shaken him not long ago, but now it seemed preferable to the unnatural silence of a place that once had rocked with merriment. It was a place of strange echoes and unpleasant stillnesses.

He put it out of his mind. In front of him was a shop whose front wall was a single, broad sheet of glass. Across it was printed the word: FOODOMAT.

He walked along the front, looking for an entrance, and for a few steps he had a companion in the glass—a tall, lean, lonely young man gliding through a silent city.

A thin, vertical line appeared in the glass, widened, became a door. D'glas hesitated in front of it, realized his hunger, and went in.

The floor was immaculate; the tables and benches were spotless. Glowing, plastic railings guided him to the right. As he approached the side wall, delicate food odors stimulated involuntary flows of saliva into his mouth.

Set into the wall were plastic, full-color solidographs of prepared foods, some familiar, others strange. Below were names and coin slots. D'glas studied them:

CHLORELLA

Bread Loaf (hi-fat) Patty (lo-fat)
(Choose sauce below)

D'glas knew what chlorella was—a multipurpose omnifood on Venus. An alga whose fat and protein content could be ad-



In the fluid, her hair afloat, was Susan. . . .

justed to fit almost any requirement, it could be grown in vast quantities wherever sunlight (or its equivalent), carbon dioxide, water, and mineral salts were available. On Venus, it was grown in polyethelene tubing, nourished partially on recirculated human wastes; it not only fed the colonists, it renewed the oxygen supply.

Another food was strange.

PLANKTON

| | | |
|------|--------|---------|
| | Cakes | Steak |
| Rare | Medium | Weldone |

(Choose sauce below)

Beyond were the synthetics: food fats from glycerin and petroleum, starches from the action of sunlight upon carbon monoxide, the amino acid proteins. D'glas knew these well.

He picked chlorella loaf, without sauce, and water. Chlorella was chlorella—there wasn't much anybody could do to it. Synthetics and sauces, on the other hand, were good things to steer clear of in a strange cuisine.

They always depended on the acquired tastes of the chemist and the cook.

The counter that ran along the wall opened up. The foods came through—the chlorella hot, the water cold. The dish and glass slid along the counter and waited for D'glas at the far end.

He carried them to the nearest table and tasted them gingerly. The water was pure within a fraction of one percent. The loaf was a good strain of chlorella ruined by poor seasoning; almost a teaspoon of salt and a dash of a sharp, unfamiliar condiment.

He ate quickly.

Satisfied but not sated, he stood up and walked toward the front of the large room. The glass opened for him, but he stopped, turned, and looked back. The empty dish and glass marred the neatness of the place. He restrained an irrational impulse to go back and remove them.

Who would care?

And who, he wondered, would come out when he was gone, to clear off the table and polish its top, to ready the restaurant for its next patron?

He suppressed a desire to call out, in the fashion of the childhood games played in the corridors and storerooms of the under-

ground city called Morgantown, "Come out, come out, wherever you are!"

He shivered and went out into the warm, clear air, thinking that this life lived out-of-doors, without mask or clouds or the endless rain, would take a long time to get used to.

The utter silence was oppressive. He stopped in the middle of the street, uncertain where to go next. The tallest building in sight had a sign that was even taller. MARS HOUSE.

D'glas walked quickly toward the red canopy. As he came under it, the walk moved beneath his feet. It was a slideway; it carried him to the portal and into the lobby.

As he stepped off, his feet gritted in red sand.

Overhead, invisibly suspended, was a sun looking oddly small.

The sun might look like that when viewed from Mars.

The back wall was curved and shiny like the outer hull of a spaceship. The elevator installed against it was in an openwork frame, a replica of the portable models he had seen on the landing field.

"Joy!" said a voice at his elbow. "There are rooms available. May I help you?"

D'glas controlled an involuntary start and turned. He was standing beside a short desk. Above it was a mech consisting of two scanners and a speaker. One scanner studied the desk; the other, and the speaker, were pointed at D'glas. "I am the desk clerk," said the speaker. "How may I be of service?"

"What rooms are available?" D'glas asked slowly and distinctly.

"Only the second and third floors, sir. The other thirty floors are filled. The rooms we have left, however, are fully equipped for temporary or permanent residence. Just slip your IDisk beneath my scanner—"

"What do you mean—permanent residence?" D'glas interrupted, at the risk of jamming the mech beyond usefulness.

"Ah, there you are, M'Gregor!" a strange voice broke in. "We've been looking for you."

D'glas spun around.

Close behind him, a smile on his craggy face, was a man D'glas had never seen before.

III

That action is best which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers.

FRANCES HUTCHESON

"SORRY to startle you," said the stranger with an engaging grin. "To tell the truth, we couldn't resist seeing your reaction to someone's voice when you thought you were in a deserted city."

It was a likable demonstration of humanity, but it brought up more questions than it answered. "Who is 'we'?" D'glas asked evenly.

The stranger grimaced. "Sorry again. That's the royal 'we,' I'm afraid. The name is Hansen." He stuck out a strong, square hand, its back furry with curly, blond hair.

D'glas took it. It felt hard, warm, and dry. "How did you know what I thought?" he asked, studying Hansen. He was as tall as D'glas and broader across the shoulders. He seemed about ten years older.

Hansen's eyebrows, almost white against his tanned face, moved expressively. "Rather obvious," he said easily. "Not much else a man can think about the City. Because it's almost true."

D'glas hesitated. There were so many questions to ask that he had difficulty choosing the next. And Hansen's answers were peculiarly unsatisfactory.

"Look!" Hansen said apologetically. "You want to know a mess of things—what's happened to the City, how I happen to know your name, where everybody is, and so on. Let's mosey over to the Council building, where we can be comfortable, and the Council will tell you everything you want to know. Okay?"

"It's not okay," D'glas said dryly, "but I guess it will have to do."

"Cigarette?" Hansen extended a metal case filled with stuffed paper cylinders. "But no—you wouldn't have picked up the habit on Venus, would you? No oxygen to spare, right? These, though, are rather special—a blend of synthetic alkaloids that supply a wonderful lift without danger of lung irritation. Don't want to short the lifespan with carcinogens, eh? Habit-forming as neo-heroin, though." He put one between his lips and sucked on it. The tip glowed and began to burn; smoke curled from his nose. "Shall we go?"

"Just a moment. I was about to get a straightforward answer to a straightforward question from this mech."

"Touché!" Hansen laughed. "But that's a simple mech. I'm afraid the answer you get will be just as unsatisfying."

"What do you mean by permanent residence?" D'glas repeated.

"Permanent residence," said the clerk mechanically, "is permanent residence."

Hansen slapped D'glas on the shoulders. "See? This mech was built to accept registrations, not to explain itself. That's something even we would have difficulty with, eh?"

"Perhaps," D'glas admitted.

As Hansen stepped onto the slideway, it reversed itself and carried him toward the street.

Watchfully, D'glas followed.

"This way," Hansen said cheerfully. He walked to the nearest corner, turned, and started down broad, worn marble steps under glowing letters that said: J.R.T. DOWNTOWN.

Hansen dropped coins into a turnstile and pushed through.

"You still pay?" D'glas asked when he had rejoined him.

"Absolutely. Be immoral not to, eh? Can't let standards slip when society is depending on you." He hopped onto an escalator that took them down to a broad platform bordered by slideways. "This way," he said gayly, hopping nimbly to the left.

D'glas followed, feeling more at home underground, fighting a delusion of safety.

The slideway paralleled an endless parade of small, two-passenger, moving cars with one seat facing the front. Hansen stepped into one. D'glas sat down beside him.

"Everything still works," D'glas said. "Food ready, drinks on tap, transportation system running. Everything ready. And nobody to—"

"Yeah," Hansen agreed, cocking a pale eyebrow. "Pitiful, isn't it? Faithful old automaton keeping things all ready for the masters who have gone away. Old Mech Tray; that sort of thing."

"Or as if someone had gone off and left the water running," D'glas suggested.

"That, too. Better fasten your safety belt."

HANSEN was already strapping himself down. Glancing once at the smooth, glowing tunnel walls, D'glas shrugged and tightened the belt across his legs. The cars were moving at the less-than-dangerous speed of 100 kilometers an hour. Being linked together, they could move no faster unless the whole, endless chain speeded up.

"Drink?" Hansen asked, indicating the dispensers lining the front of the car. "All the ethyloids. Synthetic, of course, but then, what isn't? Or maybe you'd like a shot of neo-heroin. That would bring the world into focus."

"Thanks," D'glas said dryly. "I prefer my own focus. Your comments seem to agree with my assumption that there are no more people around."

"That's right," Hansen agreed. "They do, don't they? But that isn't quite accurate. They're around—just not *around*. If you know what I mean."

D'glas resisted an urge to smash Hansen's amused smile down his irritating throat. "And everything continues automatically, is that it?"

"Right. It follows, doesn't it? Labor is unpleasant. Unpleasure is illegal. Labor is illegal. *Q.E.D.* Therefore, everything is automatic."

D'glas nodded slowly. The advantages were obvious, the disadvantages not so readily apparent. At the sacrifice of immediate progress, the colonists could mechanize Morgantown and the other settlements, could equip the combines with automatic pilots. And then—He considered the prospect. What then?

"And then," Hansen continued with inexorable logic, "everyone can devote himself to pleasure—which is, after all, the only good, eh? And the millenium is at hand—pure hedonism. Let joy reign unconfined! And speaking of joy, boy, hold your hat. Here we go again!"

From the brilliance of the glowing tunnel walls, the car dived unexpectedly into the darkness of an interrupter. *Dived* was the proper word. D'glas felt himself rise from his seat as the car plunged downward; then he was slammed down hard as the car hit bottom and straightened out. Or perhaps it started upward again. Everything was happening so fast that D'glas's per-

ceptions became confused.

Perched on the front of the car, talons disappearing into the hard metal, was an alien horror fluorescing greenly. From the waist up, it was woman—except for the wings, and they belonged with the feathered half, below.

It opened green lips. "Welcome, mortal," it drawled. "You've kept me waiting long enough!"

"Don't mind her," whispered a voice in D'glas's right ear, the one away from Hansen. "She's always impatient. She's a harpy, you know."

Before D'glas could turn his head to see who was whispering, a second winged thing appeared beside the harpy. This one was purple, also female, with snaky hair that weaved as if it had a life of its own. If possible, her face was more horrid than the harpy's.

"Move on, sister," it snarled to the harpy in a deep voice. "He's mine. After all, he has sinned."

"Haven't we all?" snapped the harpy. "You can have him when I get through, dearie. You've been satisfied with my leavings before."

"The purple one's a Fury," the voice whispered in his ear. "Don't pay any attention to them. They're mad. They're women, you know."

Out of the darkness in front, the blue, three-headed dog sprang between the woman-things, its serpent tail lashing, its three jaws agape and dripping. It sprang straight for D'glas's throat.

"Don't flinch," the voice whispered hurriedly. "They can't hurt you. They aren't in your cultural heritage at all."

Cerberus, the dog, hurtled through D'glas's body and disappeared. He was braced for the impact and felt foolish when there was none.

It was illusion, D'glas knew—but real enough. Too real. He did not like the implications at all.

This time he would look at the thing that whispered on his shoulder, he decided, but something stopped him again. The harpy and the Fury had disappeared. In their place was a horned, tailed creature attired in livid, red scales; in one hand he carried a pitchfork, in the other, casually, his spiked tail.

"Well, M'Gregor," he rolled out with

great sophistication and an urbane, man-to-man smile, "we meet at last. I'll bet you thought you'd ditched me for good back there in the Middle Ages. But there's no escaping the consciousness of sin, is there? Of course not. I've always considered myself the kind of creature who, if he had not existed, would have had to have been invented.

"Where there is sin, there is hell, whether we put it off to the Hereafter or make it now ourselves. To know sin is to feel guilt, and to feel guilt is to be punished. The only limiting factor on the punishment is the limits of our own imaginations. I'm sure we can agree on these things, eh? Come, little ones, let us show our friend what we are talking about."

THEY swarmed over the front of the car, the little demons, wielding spears, pitchforks, swords, knives, needles, stabbers of all kinds. Pain started in D'glas's foot, traveled up his calf, tormented his thigh, reached his hips, climbed to his abdomen, reached for his heart—

The car plunged into a red inferno, a pit of molten lava. Heat poured over the car, over D'glas, fantastically intolerably. D'glas lifted from his seat as the car dived straight into the middle of it.

"Mephistopheles, eh?" the voice chuckled in his ear. "Anachronous psychiatry is what I call it. Freud with hell-fire."

The scaly thing and its spawn were gone. In the car ahead was an impossibly ugly crone, almost toothless, dressed in filthy rags. She was stirring a pot and dropping indescribable substances into it; nameless things swooped around her head. She looked up, saw D'glas, and cackled.

"A handsome lad. I knew you'd come. He promised me. A young man, strong in the loins. He said, just for me. Oh, we'll be happy together, we two, like a pair of doves. We'll do our devotions together—the kind He likes. When the Coven meets, why we'll be there to share the fun, and you'll be my partner in the orgy. Oh, we'll worship the Goat, we will." She cackled again. "All will be afraid of us and pay us tribute, night or day, for the things that we might do: the curse, the evil, the witch's brew. Oh, we'll have fun, lovey, you and I."

The dark, nameless things circled closer

to D'glas's head. He could not control a shudder.

The crone squinted one eye knowingly. "I don't look too pretty now, but wait till you've sampled what's in my kettle. Then you'll see me with different eyes. To you I'll be young again, straight-bodied, firm-fleshed, and curved like a girl should be. You'll love me then, my boy. You'll never leave my side; you'll never get enough of touching me."

She lifted a spoon out of the pot and tasted the brew gingerly, one eye squinting judiciously. Lips smacking, she nodded her approval and dipped in the spoon again. This time she held it high with a bony hand and put one leg over the car which held Hansen and D'glas.

"Now it's your turn, lad," she crooned. "Open your ruby lips, lovey, and soon the world will be a different place for you and me—a place of light in the darkness and darkness in the light. Come now, lad!" She had both legs over. She was close, the spoon dripping. "Open up!"

D'glas didn't move.

"That's right," the voice whispered approvingly in his ear. "Not your dish at all."

The spoon passed through D'glas's face, and the crone disappeared, her face twisted with disappointment.

"I'm your dish," the thing on his shoulder whispered. "Or maybe you're my dish. It doesn't matter really. We were meant for each other."

This time D'glas got his head turned. Sitting on his right shoulder was an inky blob. It was nothingness personified. It was unconsciousness. It was surrender. It was the merging of the individual will into the collective will, the betrayal of all personal standards, the collectivization of the psyche.

It was everything D'glas hated. It was the reverse side of the hedonic coin, the sin to match hedonism's virtue, the hell to balance its heaven.

Only these were words, and words are meaningless in anything except a personal sense. In all heavens there is the germ of hell; in all hells, of heaven.

The blob opened bright, blue eyes and a pink mouth. "There, now," it whispered. "Aren't you glad you waited?"

It melted toward him, blurring, filtering

through the skin and bones into his skull in an unholy symbiosis. Mutely, D'glas struggled against the intolerable invasion.

Light burst into the darkness, shattered it, sent it fleeing. For a moment D'glas was blind. Then sight returned.

The car was poised on an incredible summit. The sun blazed down on them. The spires of tall buildings were so far below they looked like spikes waiting to impale them. Thousands of meters in the air, they hung between sky and earth, exposed to the perils of each.

In spite of his training, D'glas's heart thundered in his chest.

The car just ahead toppled over the peak, pulling D'glas's car to the edge. It hesitated on the brink of a precipice.

THE CAR dropped, fell, dived, plunged, plummeted. It was worse than the weightlessness that followed the cut-out of the rocket drive on the trip from Venus. They screamed down the side of the cliff into the endless depths below, waiting for them, dark and shadowed.

D'glas gripped the side of the car with desperate hands, feeling himself lifted from his seat, flung outward. It went on and on, the spires of the buildings rising to meet them, flashing past, the windows blurred on either side. And finally came the sickening onset of weight again as the car hit bottom and leveled off in the glowing tunnel once more and rolled peacefully forward as if there had been nothing really to be frightened of.

Hansen was standing. "Here we are," he said cheerily. "Coming?"

He hopped onto the slideway that ran beside the car. For a moment D'glas hesitated. Taking a deep breath, he unsnapped his safety belt and joined Hansen as he moved from highspeed to lowspeed and then to a platform that was motionless.

Ahead was an escalator that took them to the foot of stairs that mounted into the open air. Hansen paused to let D'glas catch up. He grinned. "Like the joy ride?"

"Joy ride?" D'glas echoed grimly. "That's what you call it?"

"Some people like to be frightened, you know. It gives them the sense of being alive, stimulates their adrenals, tones up their whole system. Mostly they aren't—

alive, that is. Not in any meaningful sense. They exist at a minimum level. If they can achieve the exhilaration of danger while clinging to a subconscious realization that they are completely protected, they have gained worlds without expense."

"Thanks. I'll stimulate my own adrenals," D'glas said dryly. "When anyone wanted to go anywhere else in the city, he had to go through that?"

"Oh, no. That would scarcely be hedonism, would it? When this City was really humming, there were helijets and surface cars and buses until the sky and streets were black. And less eventful subways." Hansen smiled broadly. "But, as you reminded me, that was all in the past. All things considered, it was an inefficient, wasteful method of procuring a really simple result: pleasure. And so it is only a relic."

"And yet, like everything else, it keeps running?"

"Necessarily." Hansen winked. "You noticed the apparitions, I imagine. Symbols, all, as you realized. Sort of a basic subconscious-to-subconscious hookup, eh? Well, I won't bore you with an interpretation which would, necessarily, be faulty. But did you notice that they were all personifications of sin and its psychological concomitant, guilt?"

D'glas was silent. He studied the blank-eyed buildings on either side of the darkening, twilight canyons through which they walked; the spires were gravestones in a vast necropolis, the burial ground of man's hopes of conquest and dreams of peace. They hid, as well, a mystery within them or beneath them: *how? why?* It was a mystery he had to solve, for in it lay the answer to a basic question about mankind and its future.

Wherever he was, on Earth or Venus, on Mars or Ganymede or Callisto, whatever refinements were grafted upon him, man was man, prey to the same fears, nurse to the same hopes and dreams.

Ahead, like sunlight breaking through the banks of clouds to spotlight an unexpected realization, a sudden truth, an opening in the canyon wall let in brightness and a promise of something new and vital.

"You did, of course," Hansen continued without waiting for an answer. "You are a thoughtful, perceptive person. Sin and

guilt. You would think that they would be outlawed from a hedonic world. In a sense, you would be right. Yet you would be overlooking something—the pleasures of the illicit, for without prohibition there is no pleasure; there is only contentment and the satisfaction of minor animal desires. Without hell, there is no heaven.

"And, to provide the ultimate in criminal thrill, there was that most illicit of all sensations—pain. For without pain, there is no ecstasy; there is only insensibility."

"I am not concerned with ecstasy," D'glas said sharply. "Where are we going?"

"As I told you: to the Council!"

"Where all my questions will be answered," D'glas finished, dryly. "That's fine. But where is the Council?"

"Ahead. Don't be impatient. That is unpleasure, and unpleasure is a crime."

"Than which there is no pleasure. Riddle me no more paradoxes, Hansen," D'glas said firmly. "Point it-out!"

Hansen pointed a blunt forefinger. "There. The tallest building of that group. There is the Council."

The building was like orange flame against opaque blueness, reflecting the setting sun. It was walled in metal, a flame flattened at the top. It was perhaps four blocks away and one over. There were taller buildings in other areas but none as spectacular.

D'glas didn't like the looks of it.

The canyon-walls had broken around them. To the right a wide, paved walk cut through green lawn toward a low, massive building. The grass made D'glas feel warm again. It was the first real life he had seen since landing. Someone had taken care of it, mowed it, tended it, kept it green. Not a mech, because there were imperfections—a bareness here and there, a clump of grass unven.

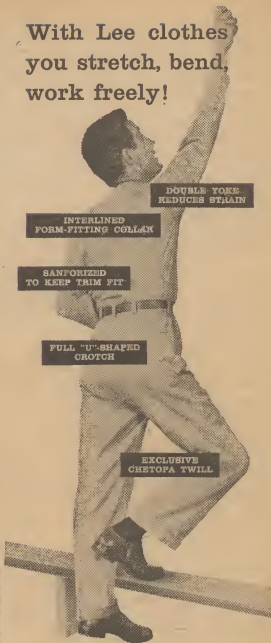
It reminded him of Venus. Only here the process had been reversed: Man had been busy turning fertile soil into a vast, stony desert.

The building was decaying. Much of the façade had fallen; it lay in heaps of rubble along the steps and across the entranceway. Only this building and the landing field had not been kept in repair.

"What is the Council?" he asked.

[Turn page]

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"The Council?" Hansen began. "Why, the Council—"

Seconds before, D'glas had seen the flicker of movement beside the building. Now he heard the stone whistle through the air; it struck with a hollow, thumping sound.

Hansen collapsed slowly, his head laid open to the split metal beneath. Inside his skull, tiny wires glistened.

The thing hit the pavement and lay still.

IV

So act as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in another, always as an end, and never as only a means.

IMMANUEL KANT

D'GLAS spun back toward the building, suppressing his irritation. The Hansen-mech was out of commission, at least temporarily. He had to decide, and quickly, whether his best opportunity lay here on the pavement or waited there beside the building.

He might discover something from a dissection of the mech, but the chances were against it. Someone was standing on a heap of rubble, tiptoeing tall to see what lay on the pavement beside him, and his decision was made.

The stone-thrower was a girl.

He sprinted toward the building. As he ran, he analyzed her. Her position on the rubble made her seem taller than she was. She was less than two meters tall, a small, slender, dark-haired girl with an oval face and blue eyes that widened now as they saw how swiftly he was approaching.

She stood for a moment, poised, her right hand ready to throw the rock it held, and then she turned, leaping from the mound, and ran swiftly around the corner of the building. D'glas raced after her.

He was just in time to see her dive through a small side doorway. At the door, he pulled up, half expecting it to be locked. But the metal door swung toward him as he tugged at it; it squealed, protesting, but it opened. Within was darkness. He entered cautiously, went down a short flight of steps, and walked into crowded shadows.

As his eyes adjusted to the shadows, he realized what the shadows were, and he recognized the function of the building.

The shadows were cases; the cases were filled with books; the building was a library. The air was filled with the dry, tickling odor of dust and decay.

He was running now, thinking of the wealth of knowledge in this room alone. There were few books on Venus, a treasure or two smuggled from Earth before the ships stopped coming. The rest of their inheritance from the past was on microfilm and could have been stored in its entirety in a room much smaller than this. Even new books were on microfilm; plastics were far easier to make than paper, and underground space is always a problem. Perhaps some day Venus would return to the relatively simpler art of making paper and books, when trees were more useful for making pulp than for making oxygen.

But the question was: had the girl stopped to hide or had she kept running?

D'glas stopped abruptly, and heard the sound of running feet, fading in the distance. He sprinted again.

He went through a doorway and up long, wide stairs to a broad, tall lobby; it was bigger than anything he had seen within walls. But there was no time to react. Shoes pounded above him, the corner of a blue skirt swirled, and there were more stairs to climb. He ran, his legs flashing, devouring the steps, and yet the girl kept ahead.

There was a third flight of stairs, and then the girl ran toward the rear of the building, through a doorway from which wooden doors had rotted and dropped away. Again they ran between stacks, countless rows of them, holding books by the thousands, by the millions.

Still D'glas could not catch up.

Surely, he thought, there will be a place where she can run no farther.

There were more stairs, but this time they were narrow metal ones with rusty iron bars for treads. Every few steps one of them sagged under D'glas's weight. Rust scaled away in a continuous rain, below him and above.

And at last the end came. At the top of the last flight of metal steps, the girl stood on a narrow landing, tugging futilely at a metal door through which orange sunlight streamed dustily.

D'glas started up the stairs. The girl spun. Her arm flashed back. The rock

was ready in it. "Stay where you are!" she said, her bosom rising and falling only a little faster than normal. "You'll get what the other got."

SHE HAD a pleasant voice. Even uttering threats, it was low and feminine.

"My reflexes are better than the mech's," D'glas panted. "I'll catch the rock, and then where will you be?" He climbed another step; the whole flight sagged under him.

"Don't be ridiculous!" she snapped, her eyes furiously blue. "Back!" Her arm tensed.

D'glas jumped to the floor, his eyes flicking briefly to the old, iron stanchion that supported the corner of the landing on which the girl stood. Perhaps the door above leaked. Whatever the reason, the bar was rotten with rust; in one spot, it was eaten almost in two. His weight had bucked it outward, but now it held again.

D'glas moved over beside the landing and looked up. "Why can't we be friends?"

"What's that?" she asked bitterly. "Only people can be friends."

"Well?" he asked, puzzled. Then his face cleared. "Oh, and you're not?"

"Don't taunt me!" she warned, her arm tensed again.

"I see. You think I'm not people."

"Of course you're not! I'm the only one left in the city; perhaps the only one in the world. It's just another of the Council's tricks."

"I don't know what you mean by that, but if you're the only one left you should be glad to see me." D'glas grinned. "I'm from Venus."

Her arm hesitated and then readied itself again. "I don't believe you. You were with the mech."

"Why not? It was taking me to the Council."

"Why should you want to go to the Council?"

"To find out what's happened here. To tell the Council what's happened on Venus. To ask for help. As a matter of fact, your missile came at an inopportune moment. It was obvious from the start that it wasn't human. With that advantage, I hoped to accomplish something."

"Don't live on illusions!"

He liked this girl, her appearance, her independence, her quick mind. "But how did you know it wasn't human?" he asked abruptly.

She laughed without mirth. "After so long, you can sense them—the little imperfection in the way they walk, their hidden reservoir of power, their single-mindedness. But then, what else could it be? I told you I was the only one left."

"If you can sense them, you should be able to sense that I'm not one of them," D'glas pointed out gently.

She frowned thoughtfully. "They've tried to trick me before, but it's the first time I've been chased. Maybe I think you're what you pretend to be. But I can't take chances. What proof do I have?"

"What proof have I," D'glas said slowly, "that you're human?"

Slowly, thoughtfully, her arm lowered. Instantly, D'glas lunged into the rusted stanchion. It snapped. The landing sagged with an animal screech of bolts dragged from the wall.

At the first movement, the girl whirled, reaching for the doorknob, but the landing sagged a little more, throwing her against the railing. She leaped. The landing toppled beneath her, rending its way downward.

Her hands clawed at the door and missed. She fell backward toward the floor and the twisted metal that had preceded her.

MIRACULOUSLY dodging the falling stairway, D'glas was waiting for her. His arms scooped her out of the air. He caught her right hand immediately, but the rock was gone.

For a moment, gasping, she let herself crumple against him. After the first impact, she wasn't heavy. She was, he realized with some surprise, quite an interesting armful. It was not entirely because she was the first girl he had seen in three months. The first human, in fact, he corrected quickly—but it was the femininity that made it interesting.

"There," he said gayly, smiling into her drawn face, "that's better, isn't it?"

Her color flooded back, and one fist fetched him a stinging clout along the jaw. He dropped her.

She landed in the wreckage of the stairs.

She stiffened. "Owwww!" she cried out, and scrambled up quickly with a sound of ripping plastic, rubbing the injured area. Almost speechless with anger, she spluttered, "You— You—"

D'glas touched his jaw and waggled it experimentally to see if it was broken. He decided that it wasn't. "You didn't seem to appreciate my rescuing you," he said innocently.

Her face worked for a moment. She sniffled. A sob broke from her throat. Two tears gathered in the corners of her eyes, tore free, and coursed a muddy channel through the dust on her face. She began to cry.

D'glas was shocked. He had not seen tears since he had been a child. Now they left him helpless.

Understanding came. She was only a girl, a young one, and alone. She had put up a good fight against a man who had been hedonically trained and tested in competition. Defeated, hurt, humiliated, defenseless, it was little wonder that she sobbed.

Gently he took her in his arms; he pulled her close. She came, unresisting, weeping. She cried against his shoulder. "There, there," he said ineffectually, patting her clumsily on the back. "That's all right. I'm sorry."

Slowly the sobs turned to sniffles and the sniffles to uneven breaths that caught in her throat. As she regained self-control, she drew back, wiping the tears away with the back of one hand. It left black smudges across her cheeks.

She was a little girl, he thought tenderly. An urchin. She had been playing with the big boys and got hurt. He caught her shoulder and tried to turn her around. "Are you hurt bad?" he asked solicitously.

She pulled herself away and put one hand behind her. "Never mind!" she said with great dignity. "It's nothing."

D'glas shrugged, his fatherly instincts submerged before her sudden return to maturity. He watched her closely.

"Well," she said defiantly, "what now?"

He smiled, liking her. "Now, some answers."

"What makes you think you'll get them?"

"I'll get them," he said confidently.

"But there must be a better place than this to talk. Lead me to it!" She hesitated. "Please?" he added.

She shrugged, as if recognizing the futility of resistance, and moved away among the stacks, one hand behind to hold together her torn skirt. D'glas stayed close to her, watchful for the smallest sign that she was going to break away.

"I'm D'glas M'Gregor," he said. "And I still want to be friends."

For a moment her back remained stiff. Then, over her shoulder, she said, "Susan."

"Susan what?"

"Just Susan. When there's only one person left—or two or three—there's no need for more names than one."

"Then you've been alone for a long time."

"Since I was ten. That's when my mother died. She died in childbirth, refusing the Council's help. My father assisted, but nothing could have saved her. The son they wanted died too. A few weeks later I lost Father."

"How?"

She gave him a quick glance over her shoulder. "He was unhappy. He couldn't fight it. He never got over my mother's death. So the Council took him."

"He's dead, then?"

"No. Just gone. Like the others. Since then I've been alone. Ten years alone." Her shoulders straightened, as if to repress a shiver.

"That's over now," D'glas said kindly. "You don't have to be alone any more."

As they came to the broad staircase, she let him draw even with her, and the glance she gave him was almost friendly. Immediately, she looked away. He resisted an impulse to touch her. It wasn't time. But it was pleasant, anticipating.

On the second floor, she led him to a door inset with translucent glass. Across it was printed: HEAD LIBRARIAN.

BEYOND it was a living room furnished and decorated with excellent taste; yet it did not sacrifice comfort. It was a room he liked instantly. Even his highly trained sensory discriminations could find no flaw in it.

Beyond, through a hall, was a bedroom, just as tastefully planned and arranged but

more feminine. Between the rooms, off the hall, was a necessary.

"If you don't mind," Susan said with heavy irony, "I'd like to clean up and change my clothes."

"Certainly," Douglas said. But he kept her under observation as he moved into the bedroom and went quickly through drawers that slid out of the wall at his touch. They held clothing only—fresh, never-worn synthetics. There were two closets. Behind one sliding door were dresses and suits. A floor rack, swinging out, was stacked with shoes.

Behind the second door was an armory.

D'glas had never seen a real weapon before, but he called on his memory, reviewing an almost forgotten trip.

There were minims, tiny hand guns; machine pistols; high-velocity rifles with explosive bullets; a rocket launcher; racks of grenades—

D'glas slid the door shut and turned to Susan. "Sorry I can't trust you yet," he apologized, "but I can't afford to let you run away because you're frightened, or kill me because you don't understand. My mission is too important. Pick out what clothing you want. Bring it with you."

He watched her as she selected it, ignoring her displeasure. When she had her arms filled, he led the way to the necessary. It was more ample than most, but the equipment, except for a small dressing table in one corner, was standard. The cubicle was windowless. The only exit, except for the door, was the disposal chute, and that was too narrow even for Susan's slimness.

As he left the room, Susan demanded petulantly, "What's so important about your mission? If you really are from Venus, what do you want with the Council? What did you want to tell the Council?"

"We're being observed by aliens," D'glas said. "Their purpose—" he shrugged—"we can only guess at. Probably conquest."

The necessary door slid shut. The last sentence he had to say softly to himself.

"But it looks as if they beat me here."

D'glas waited patiently. It was half an hour before Susan emerged, scrubbed, her face glowing with subcutaneous health, her hair damp and curly from the shower's steam. She was wearing a loose-fitting gray suit, her hand resting casually in one

pocket of the jacket, seemingly careless of the effect her appearance had on him.

But it was only seeming. No woman spends half an hour merely getting clean; no woman picks out clothing that compliments her appearance and coloring so much as this gray suit flattered Susan; no woman applies cosmetics so carefully that they are undetectable—unless she is concerned about some man's opinion.

"Beautiful!" D'glas said. "But you know that."

She shook her head. "I didn't know it." But her eyes were wide, and he had a distant understanding, suddenly, what it must be like to grow up alone. It was surprising she was so normal.

"Sit down," he said, patting the love seat cushion beside him. She sat down gingerly. "Your father must have been a hedonist," he said.

She nodded. "That's right. The last of the real hedonists. You know what a hedonist is?"

D'glas smiled tolerantly. "On Venus we have what they tried to build here—a society founded on basic hedonic principles, a careful balance between objective reality and subjective attitude."

Her eyes shone. "That must be heaven," she whispered.

"I don't see how it could be improved," D'glas admitted, and paused, wondering. A few months ago, he hadn't considered it so perfect. But then there had been nothing with which to compare it. Perhaps the Hansen-Mech was right: in order to appreciate heaven, one must have hell. "And yet," he added honestly, "there's hard work; no end of that. The joy of bringing a dead planet to life is never done. But, of course, everything depends on the attitude."

"Certainly. I know hedonics. My father taught me, before he left. After that I kept up the studies and the exercises which taught me that as long as I was happy, I was safe from the Council. My freedom depended on it."

SHE WAS slowly relaxing. Her back had touched the backrest of the loveseat.

"You lived here—the three of you—until your mother died. And then, because your father was grieved by your mother's death, the Council took him." She nodded.

"Why?" he asked. "I don't understand."

"It was against the law," she said, frowning. "To be unhappy, that is. We were safe as long as we were happy, and we were happy, for ten years. The only three people left in the world, happy together. Strictly speaking, Father shouldn't have let himself become emotionally involved with us and, in a way, that was his tragedy. The Inconstancy clause of the Hedonic Oath bound him not to love or wed or father; then he could always perform his duties to his dependents. But we were his only dependents, and he thought he was safe."

"Since then you've lived here all alone," D'glas said softly, his voice and face sympathetic. "Poor kid."

She bit her lower lip because it had begun to tremble. "It wasn't so bad," she said bravely. "The worst was realizing that Father loved Mother more than he loved me. Oh, I realized later how silly that was. And then trying to be happy even though they both were gone. But I had to, because I knew how important it was."

D'glas put his hand protectively over hers. She let it stay there. "Funny," he mused. "Everything else is maintained. Only the landing field and this library have been allowed to deteriorate. Why?"

"There was no more use for the field. Why should anyone want to leave when he could have happiness here—couldn't escape it, in fact? His wanting to leave was *prima facie* evidence of unhappiness and made him a criminal, subject to sentence."

"Sentence?" D'glas echoed.

Her fingers tightened on his. "Sentenced to paradise. The library was in the same category. What was the point in preserving it? Knowledge was only a means, and it had done all it could; paradise was available. Knowledge, in itself, never made anyone happy. Progress could go no farther. There is nothing beyond perfection, and paradise is perfection, by definition. So we could live here—we three refugees from paradise—as long as we were happy." Her voice trembled. "But we weren't satisfied. Desire entered, and with it came discontent, change, death, sorrow—"

Her voice broke. She turned toward D'glas blindly, her face seeking. He welcomed her into his arms; his lips descended

to her, gently at first and then more firmly. She melted against him.

She moved in his arms. Something small and hard pressed into his abdomen. "That's enough," she said coldly.

D'glas glanced down. In her right hand was a minim, its barrel trying to leave its imprint on his body. "Where did you get that?" he asked in amazement.

"I keep one clipped inside the disposal chute in case I'm ever surprised in the necessary," she said without inflection. "Get up!" D'glas stood up. "Walk toward the door, slowly." D'glas obeyed. "Open it. Take one step forward and turn around. Don't make any sudden moves. I'll shoot at your shadow. Now close the door."

D'glas frowned at the translucent glass panel and the words painted on it: HEAD LIBRARIAN. Was she mad? And then he realized that she was not; she was just careful. The glass panel doubled as a fluorescent screen. He was being X-rayed.

He relaxed, and his mind drifted to what she had said about her father—gone but not dead. When she flung open the door, he said, "Susan. The Council—"

"D'glas!" she cried, unheeding. "You *are* human! I was afraid to believe it, afraid that—" And then her lips found his, clumsy at first but infinitely educable and learning fast, and the time for questions was past. . . .

D'glas raised himself on one elbow. "Susan," he began, "you were going to tell me—" He stopped. She was asleep, her cheeks flushed, her hair like a dark, soft halo on the pillow beneath her head, beautiful beyond description.

He smiled ruefully. Every time he was about to learn something about this crazy world, there was an interruption.

V

*And there is even a happiness
That makes the heart afraid.*

THOMAS HOOD

D'GLAS awoke instantly, feeling alone and apprehensive. Beside him, the bed was empty. He touched the sheet. Cold. "Susan!" he called.

Sooner than the silence, the echoes told him that Susan was gone. Except for him, the rooms were empty.

Against the drapes that covered the tall windows, the morning sun was beating. A pale imitation of its brilliance filtered through to him.

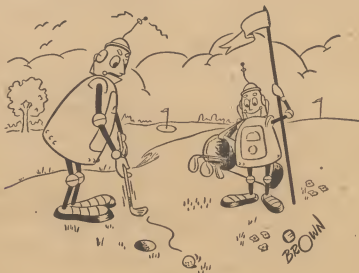
So truth, he thought dismally, filters through the barrier of our senses.

He sat up, hugging his knees, and faced the fact of his insufficiency. He was not master of himself and his happiness as he had thought. Unsuspecting, he had surrendered his hedonic state to an outsider, a girl with blue eyes to see him as he was, with soft lips to lure him, with dark hair to wind around his heart.

her beauty, her firm body, her need of him—he felt a soft outpouring of affection, his adrenals, his pituitaries, his hypothalamus working automatically.

The thought that he might have lost her, that somehow, by some tragic circumstance, she might never return to him, made him weak and sapped his powers of movement and decision. He frowned savagely and refused to think of Susan in any personal sense. With an effort born of desperation, he succeeded in thinking of her only as an auxiliary to his main purpose.

This was certain: his duty came first.



"I must be getting rusty"

Against his will, he was in love with Susan.

It was not part of the plan. It could be disastrous.

From the available evidence, the alien^s had already conquered Earth. Where the humans were, if they were still alive, was uncertain, although by now D'glas could make a shrewd guess.

The inescapable fact: he was one man—hedonically trained though he was—pitted against vast and undefined forces. It was an unfortunate time to lose effective control over his ductless glands and their dangerous secretions.

Even now, at the unsought memory of Susan—her courage, her independence,

He slipped out of bed. A few minutes in the necessary cleansed him, refreshed him, depilated his day-old beard. Emerging, he considered with distaste the prospect of resuming the clothing he had worn yesterday, but there was no help for it. Susan's clothing was not only the wrong shape; it was much too small.

He shrugged, reflecting: What cannot be cured must be endured. Dressed, he inspected the clothes closet. Only a pair of shorts and a tunic were missing.

A minim and several grenades were gone from the armory. The grenades were about twice the size of his thumb nail. They were armed by flipping over a lever against the tug of a spring. When the lever was re-

leased, it sprang back. There was probably a few seconds after that before explosion. D'glas slipped a handful into one jacket pocket.

He took a machine pistol and broke it down. Its method of operation was simple, and it was in good shape, the parts clean and glistening with a thin film of oil. He snapped it back together and put it in the other pocket.

The magazine held fifty bullets which could be fired singly or in bursts of five. He wouldn't need any more ammunition. Open warfare—one man against a world—would be insane.

His eyes were alert as he left the bedroom, but they noticed nothing out of place until he reached the door. Fastened to the glass was a sheet of paper. On it was handwriting, the spelling archaic, the phrasing quaint, but the writing slender, well-formed, and attractive—like Susan herself:

You looked tired, so I did not wake you. I have gone out for food and clothing. It was provident of me, I suppose, not to have these things on hand, but I did not expect to have a man around.

D'glas smiled involuntarily and then turned it into a frown. He read on:

Don't be alarmed if I'm not here when you wake up, or if I'm delayed in returning. There is small danger in this kind of foraging and I am used to it. Don't worry. I have survived alone for ten years. I write survived because I do not count the days before yesterday as *living*.

Wait for me, darling. I love you.

Susan.

D'glas studied the note expressionlessly. Then he picked up the mechanical pen from the table beside the door and wrote, beneath Susan's signature:

Couldn't wait. After this is over, I'll return if I can. Stay here. Don't get involved.

He frowned at it. It was, perhaps, more brusque than he had intended, but he resisted the impulse to soften it with sentiment. Sentiment was dangerous. Until his mission was completed, one way or another, he had to stay away from Susan, he had to fight free of the emotional entangle-

ments that could only spell disaster.

HE TOSSED the pen down with untended vigor and walked quickly, impatiently, out of the room and down the broad steps to the library entrance.

The Hansen-mech was still lying on the sidewalk. There was one significant change. The neck was an empty stalk; where the head had been, there was a black spot on the pavement. Scattered across the sidewalk were fragments of metal and something that resembled sponge platinum.

Deadly little Susan, D'glas thought.

• Something snuffled.

D'glas looked up quickly. Coming toward him, filling the street from side to side, flanked by two miniature editions of itself, came a swishing, snuffling monster.

It was only fifty meters away.

D'glas leaped, turned, raced for the shelter of the library, and swung back toward the street, the machine pistol ready in his right hand, a grenade in the other. And he felt foolish.

The monster was a streetcleaner mech. Its gaping mouth reached from curb to curb, snuffling up dust and refuse. Underneath its flat, slick body, particles danced as ultrasonic vibrations loosened stubborn dirt and grease and whisked them away. Behind it, the street gleamed like polished metal.

The smaller mechs cleaned the sidewalks. All three of the automatic machines ignored him.

As he watched, the nearest of them swept up bits of metal that set up an internal clamor, and then pulled to a stop in front of the humanoid body that had called itself Hansen. The body was too big for the little cleaning mech to handle—or for the, big one, either.

The little one swung aside without hesitation; the other two went on, unheeding. Past the little one came a mech something like a big-mouthed beetle. It rolled smoothly down the sidewalk, scooped up the body, swallowed, and retreated.

The cleaning mech swung back into position and hustled down the sidewalk, snuffling and vibrating furiously, until it was once more in position. Then it resumed the more leisurely procession.

It was a remarkable performance. At the same time, it was an example of com-

plete waste and futility. This was for no one's benefit. Only two persons could possibly enjoy it, even incidentally, and the work would have gone on even if they had not been there.

Susan was not in sight. D'glas looked thoughtfully at the building the Hansen-mech had pointed out as the Council building. This morning it gleamed whitely. It might be the Council building; it might not. In any case, it was too soon to go there. Yesterday, with Hansen, it had seemed like the thing to do. Today he had more knowledge and greater reason for caution.

The mystery of the Council would have to wait until he was better prepared. He had to know a great deal more.

Across the polished street, a sign on a tall, windowless building boasted:

PARADISE HOTEL

Happy Rooms

All modern conveniences

As D'glas entered the clean, well-lighted lobby, a voice said, "There is no room available. You will have to try elsewhere."

It was the desk clerk, its eye staring at him blankly, its round mouth gaping with imbecilic single-mindedness. D'glas ignored it. He walked toward the back of the lobby.

"No room, no room!" the clerk said vigorously.

D'glas walked on.

"Stop!" shouted the clerk. "You are breaking the law! Disturbing lawfully sealed rooms is a felony punishable by not less than five nor more than ten years loss of happiness or, where loss of second party's happiness can be proved, by transorbital lobotomy."

D'glas turned impatiently and shot the clerk through its cyclopean eye. Its mouth froze in a mute O of horror.

THERE were ten elevators. Nine doors were welded shut. The tenth was the service elevator. As D'glas approached, a gate swung across the entrance and locked.

"I am for emergency use only," came hollowly from the car in a deep, moronic voice. "Utility equipment and stores will be permitted to enter. Passengers will use the other cars. I am for emergency—"

"This is an emergency," D'glas snapped.

"Utility equipment and stores will be permitted to enter," the service elevator

continued, unmoved. "Passengers—"

D'glas turned away helplessly. Behind, like a taunt, the elevator gate swung open. D'glas mounted the stairs, broad and resilient beneath his feet. At the head of the stairs was a solid wall of plastic, sealing the corridor from wall to wall. He had seen one like that before, and a sign like the metal plaque in the middle of it:

DO NOT DISTURB

All Rooms Occupied

Sealed this day: 4-11-03

by order of the Council

This time it would not stop him; the time for action was now.

He retreated to the landing, halfway down the stairs, and took out one of the grenades. He flipped over the lever and tossed the grenade at the foot of the plastic wall. The next instant he was back at the lobby level, waiting.

Ore, two, three, four—*K A - ROOMMMM!*

The building shuddered. The walls shook. From the tall lobby ceiling dropped a sheet of plastic; it landed flat, splatting on the floor. A mixed cloud billowed down the stairs: smoke, dust, and the biting odor of chemical explosive.

Somewhere in the lobby a bell began to ring, clangorously. "Emergency! Emergency!" shouted the service elevator: "Fire!" screamed a second voice. "Don't get excited! Keep calm! Everybody will be all right if you don't get excited!"

At the rear of the lobby a short, wide door flipped up. Under it charged a squat, red mech loaded with metal bottles and hoses and nozzles. It raced to the stairs on rubber treads, a heat-sensitive nose seeking the flames. It trundled up the steps, unlimbering a hose like a snake lifting its head to strike. It turned at the landing and was out of sight.

Something hissed briefly. A moment later the fire-fighter mech returned, rolling with quiet efficiency, a dribble of foam squeezing out of a hose as it was rolled back into place. D'glas started up the stairs as soon as it was out of the way.

All that remained of the plastic barrier was melted shards around the edges of the walls and ceiling. Beyond was a dark corridor lined with shallow doorways. Down the corridor, snuffing toward the wreckage,

came a miniature edition of the street-cleaner mech.

Through a gap in the foot-deep layer of foam, D'glas could see a hole in the floor. Wires were exposed; pipes were broken. Fluids gushed from the pipes: some red, some cloudy. The red jet pulsed arterially.

D'glas jumped the gap and turned quickly away from the sweeper, which was almost upon him. He stopped short. Facing him was a fat-bellied mech with a single nozzle raised head high, staring at him like an eye on a stalk. It spat.

D'glas doged. It spat again. This time some of the stuff hit his jacket and hardened instantly. It was plastic. D'glas knew what the mech was—a spinning mech for walls, ceilings, and those enigmatic barriers.

Only now it was intent upon spinning him, like a wasp putting away food for its young.

The sweeper snuffled at his heels, trying to push forward. As he dodged the spinner again, something whistled past his face and stuck, quivering, in the floor. A screw-driver.

Above him, clinging to the ceiling with suction-cup legs, was a mechanized tool chest with flexible, octopoid arms. One of the arms was drawn back to toss a smoking soldering iron at his head.

D'glas leaped backward, clearing the sweeper, and tossed a shot at the repair mech. It hit the tool chest and passed through cleanly. There was no apparent damage. The soldering iron missed and began to char the floor, but the repair mech began searching itself for more missiles; spikes, chisels, drills, hatchets, wrenches, shears—

D'glas dodged another expectoration from the spinner and poured five more bullets into the repair mech before it froze, four arms poised. Quickly he stooped and flipped the sweeper over on its back. It lay like a turtle, hissing helplessly, wheels spinning in the air.

RETREATING out of the spinner's range, its progress blocked now by the upset sweeper, D'glas glanced at one of the doorways. They were shallow because they were sealed hermetically with plastic. On this was another of the Do Not Disturb

plaques. The date was 2102. Whatever was inside had been there for more than fifty years.

He left a grenade in the doorway and faded down the hall. At the explosion, he raced back. The gushing river caught him halfway; it came pouring out of the shattered doorway and surged down the corridor. There was no use fighting it. D'glas concentrated only on keeping his feet.

The odor was familiar. As part of his hedonic training, D'glas had assisted in the Morgantown hospital. The river was amniotic fluid.

It dropped quickly from waist level to shoe top and then to a thin trickle. D'glas moved forward, slowly now, his clothing soaked and uncomfortable, reluctant to find out what he was expecting.

He was almost too preoccupied to see the fire-fighter mech as it charged heroically up the stairs, throwing foam at him through a frosty funnel. The second shot stopped it.

There had been no need for the fire-fighter. The fluid pouring through the doorway had put out whatever fires the grenade had started.

It was an odd room, a sort of shapeless, plastic-lined cocoon without furnishings. The thing had floated submerged in the fluid. It lay on the floor now, limbs twisting spasmodically.

It was male: the long, white beard was proof of that. It was a pitiful thing, a kind of caricature of humanity, a fantastically hairy gnome curled blindly into a fetal position. It was naked; its skin where it showed through the matted hair, grubby-white and wrinkled from the long immersion.

It had floated in this room in its gently moving nest of hair, nourished by the thick, fleshlike cord trailing from a tap protruding through the wall to where it had been grafted to the navel, dreaming the long, slow, happy, fetal dreams.

It was a disquieting parody of the embryo in the human uterus. This was where everybody was. This was the end man had reached. The end was the beginning.

D'glas thought suddenly of Susan, and some ancient words came into his mind, unwilling:

*Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;*

Those are pearls that were his eyes—

He did not bother to suppress his revulsion as he stepped into the dark, little cell. The odor was almost overpowering; the room went suddenly dark. Unexpectedly, he found himself at peace. It wasn't an approximation of peace but the archetypal sensation, utter and complete.

He was happy. He lay cushioned in soft, warm darkness, fed and contented. The shapeless Forms drifted slowly through his dreaming mind. He was safe, secure, protected through the long, silent twilight of the sheltering womb. . . .

Out of nowhere came a survival instinct. D'glas staggered back into the light and sound and sanity of the corridor; the illusions cut off cleanly. He stood in the cold, alien place, shivering and forlorn, knowing again the intolerable violation of his primal paradise, reliving the long-buried memory of being torn savagely from the warm peace of his mother's womb.

Only his hedonic training kept in a wail of protest. Only reflexes kept him upright as he stood fighting it, feet spread, head bowed, eyes closed, trembling.

It was a battle he had to win, and, in the end, he won. But it shook him; it took its toll of his strength and determination and will to survive. It is a terrible thing to be born, but it is far worse to be born again, knowing what life is, knowing that paradise is lost forever.

Not womb to tomb, he thought. Womb to womb. That was man's beginning and his end. He had come full circle. It was Mother Earth with a vengeance. Man had hollowed himself out a second womb and crawled within it to spend the rest of his days. He had built himself a last refuge against life and retreated within it for the slow, happy death.

These aged embryos would live a long time. A long, long time. Floating as they were, there would be no strains on their tissues and internal organs. Nourished as they were from some central source, through some blood-surrogate rich in food and oxygen, pushed by some heartlike pump, most of the organs would not even need to work. Heart failure would not kill them; diseases could never enter their sealed havens from death and the long decay of living.

A THOUSAND years, these fetal things might live. Or two thousand, or five thousand. What was it said about some fish? Barring accidents, they would live forever. And there were samples of tissue which had been kept alive indefinitely *in vitro*.

It didn't matter. These fetal gnomes were alive in only a technical sense. And when they died, finally, as all men born of women must, the race of Man would be dead with them.

And yet it was infinitely seductive, this slow suicide. D'glas could feel its lure yet; it was an effort of will to remain standing outside the womb. It would take a strong man to conquer it, a man so strong that he could deny the mortality within him and the life-long agony of deprivation.

D'glas opened his eyes. Inside the cell, the thing had stopped twitching. It was dead. The concussion had killed it; but the shock of this second parturition alone would have been enough. Slower, perhaps, but just as sure.

This was only a sample. There must be billions of these cells across the face of the Earth; in them the billions of men and women had returned to their embryonic bliss. It was all wrong. It was as if they had returned to the soupy seas of the primeval Earth, returned to being blind, protoplasmic cells—

No, it was the wrong image. Even protoplasm is dissatisfied. That is the condition of life. That was the motivating power behind the drive that had culminated in the most dissatisfied, the most creative of protoplasmic agglutinations—Man.

Now, here on the world where he was born, where he strove and developed and grew, Man was satisfied, Man was happy, Man was dead—no matter how long these foster-wombs kept the fossils alive.

"But can't it be said," a voice broke into his reverie, "that here hedonism has reached its goal: the greatest happiness of the greatest number?"

At the first sound of the voice, something dropped over D'glas's shoulders and tightened around his arms, pinning them helplessly to his sides. A second loop followed and a third, and he was caught, irretrievably. He turned his head, looking for his captor.

Behind him was another mech, a spidery

creature with many legs, two arms, and a long, thin, extensible nose. From the nose came an endless rope of insulated wire.

It had crept up behind him and spun its web. The nose worked on; the wire crept up his body. He began to feel like a pupa in a cocoon.

He tensed his muscles for the struggle; then relaxed. There was no use wasting his strength futilely.

He turned his head in the opposite direction.

"We meet again," Hansen said cheerfully.

VI

The office of government is not to confer happiness, but to give men opportunity to work out happiness for themselves.

WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING

THAT a duplicate could have a duplicate should not have surprised him. But it took swift mental effort to banish the memory of the Hansen-mech lying on the sidewalk, his head crushed and then disintegrated, and the beetle-mech gobbling the body down.

"As I was saying when we were so rudely interrupted," Hansen continued easily, "the Council is the Council. But you've had too many tautological answers. It's time your questions were satisfied."

Satisfied, D'glas inspected the word quickly. Was there mockery in it?

"It's unfortunate," Hansen went on, his voice considerate, "that you didn't take advantage of your opportunity before. Because now you must come before the Council as a murderer." His eyes flickered to the dead thing on the floor of the cell.

"Murder involves intent, and the victim must be human," D'glas said evenly. "Prove either!" He smiled grimly. "Charge me with abortion, if you must. You talk a great deal about hedonism. What if I should tell you that I am unhappy, tied like this?"

"Why, the wrapping would be removed," Hansen said urbane. "Unswathe him," he commanded the wiring mech. As the loops fell away, he said, "But I must remind you that, although we are concerned with your happiness, we are also concerned with the happiness of five billion others. You will be watched. If you should try to

escape, you will be restrained, and the restraint might be less considerate next time."

"I understand," D'glas said, as his hands were freed.

"And, of course," Hansen said, "we must disarm you."

With a swift, strong pull, the wiring mech stripped his jacket down over his arms and tossed it into the cell with the dead thing. The spinning mech passed on silent wheels, its snaky head raised, ignoring them all. It stopped in front of the shattered doorway. A balloon bellied out of its body and filled the opening. Against it, the mech began to spin a plastic wall. When it was finished, D'glas thought, the balloon would collapse and be drawn through the hole it was filling. With one last expectation, the mech would seal up the doorway.

D'glas turned away and walked toward the stairs, Hansen following close behind. The repair mech was working on the hole in the floor at the head of the stairs. As they approached, it tightened the last joint of the pipes that had been broken. Other arms were already replacing the flooring. Soon, D'glas thought, the only trace of his intrusion would be sealed behind two plastic barriers.

TWO WOMEN were waiting for him in the lobby. They were the most beautiful creatures D'glas had ever seen.

One was a blonde, the other brunette. Their features were chiseled perfection softened by a feminine warmth; their bodies exquisitely curved and infinitely promising under the thin concealment of white uniforms.

They smiled tenderly as he came near.

"Hello, D'glas," the blonde said warmly. "We've been waiting for you."

"Both of us," added the brunette huskily.

"Really?" D'glas said.

The blonde nodded. A wisp of platinum hair drifted across her forehead; she brushed it back with an attractive feminine gesture. "All your life," she said.

"But that doesn't matter," said the brunette. "What matters is now, and now is ours."

"Both of you?" D'glas echoed, smiling.

"However you want us," said the blonde, meltingly. "Whatever you want."

They each took an arm and pressed it

against them. D'glas looked from the blonde to the brunette, smiling gently, and then down at his arms. "This is more pleasant than the wire," he said, "but just as effective."

"You have no idea how pleasant it might be," Hansen said, behind. "They mean what they say. Their only function is to make you happy, to be nurse to your every desire."

"Could they nurse the sickness of my soul?" D'glas asked softly.

"Their equipment isn't all obvious," Hansen went on. "If you looked closely at their fingers, you would find a tiny hole in each tip. Every finger is a hypodermic, in them barbiturates to make you sleep, amphetamines to wake you up, narcotics to enhance the senses, aphrodisiacs when the flesh weakens." Hansen's voice sobered. "And, of course, one finger is loaded with a fast-acting anesthetic in case restraint becomes necessary."

"There is a symbolism there which speaks for itself."

"But they don't need to hold you if it makes you unhappy."

D'glas shrugged. "What does it matter? Come on, girls."

Jauntily, they walked into the street. D'glas cast one longing glance across the street at the crumbling library and then turned his eyes resolutely toward the distant Council building, but not before he thought he saw a flicker of movement through the wide doorway.

They sauntered down the middle of the street, D'glas between the two lifelike woman-mechs, Hansen respectfully behind. "I'll call you Scylla," D'glas said to the blonde. "And Charybdis," he said to the brunette.

"Call me anything," breathed Charybdis, "just so you call me."

D'glas chuckled. It was merrier than he felt.

The gleaming magnesium spire of the Council building came closer. The noon sun burned down, turning it into cold flame. It drew the eye and captured the imagination like a living symbol of man's final triumph over form and color. Instead of fading as they drew nearer, the illusion intensified.

The wide archway was uncluttered with doors or other barriers. They walked be-

neath it and stood under the tall, gleaming dome of the vast lobby. D'glas felt a kind of reverence settle over him, as if he had entered a holy place.

Why not? he thought. This is the temple in which Man enshrined his dream of happiness. It should be more worthy of reverence than any holy place ever, because this dream came true.

That, of course, was the tragedy.

"WELCOME, D'GLAS M'GREGOR," said the metal lobby in a great, ringing voice. "WELCOME, MY SON RETURNED. COME TO ME."

The door opened in the wall like a metallic mouth. They walked in, the woman-mechs and the man-mechs and D'glas. The mouth closed. The room moved. It was a terrifying moment.

There was light. The room was an elevator, rising. But D'glas knew, at that moment, what the Council was.

He was inside the Council.

The Council was this building. The Council, guardian of paradise, ruler of this corner of the universe, was a giant mech.

TIME passed, and the elevator rose, and D'glas never knew how long it took to reach their destination. When the car stopped, he knew only that they were high in the building. From the moment he entered the building, reality ceased to have an objective meaning. Time and place became abstractions without referents.

From the car, they went into a comfortable, attractive room lined with old-fashioned books and paneled in dark, rich imitation wood. Flames leaped briskly in a soot-blackened fireplace, sending out a comfortable wave of warmth and the fragrance of clear, northern nights—

D'glas shook himself. What did he know of clear, northern nights?

"Easy, girls," he said, extricating his arms from their dangerous embrace. "No stabbbing, now." He rubbed his fingers across the paneling. Perhaps it was real wood; there was a texture to it. He touched the back of a book, held out a hand to the fire. Everything seemed real enough: the grain of the leather binding, the play of heat on his hand. "Very good," he said. He turned to the woman-mechs. "You bore me."

They disappeared. There were no explo-

sions, not even the clap of air rushing in to fill the spaces emptied. One instant they were there; the next they were gone.

"You, too," he said to Hansen.

Hansen shrugged. "As you wish," he said. He vanished.

"What is, reality?" D'glas muttered.

"What does it matter?" asked the flames leaping in the fireplace. "There is you. There is I. There are the thoughts that pass between us. These are the only things of meaning. All else is illusion. What you see, here or anywhere, is merely the impact of photons on your retina. What you sense is merely your mind's subjective interpretation of electrical flows through your sensory network. Which is real: the mind's impression, the electrical flow, the triggering of the flow, or that which may or may not exist outside this system? Reality? It is only the illusion we can agree upon. This illusion now—do you like it?"

"No," D'glas said.

"Speak if you wish," said the room, as the fire mouth faded back into randomness. "If the sound of your own voice pleases you or if my monologue depresses you. Because we have much to speak of."

"What are you called?"

"I have been called Council, because I assumed the duties of the Hedonic Council from the men who once composed it. Others have called me Hedon. And some have called me God."

Somehow, in that gentle, unemotional voice, it did not seem blasphemous. There had been lesser beings called divine.

"But it is not necessary to address me at all," the room said. "There is only you and I."

"And Susan."

"Ah, yes," the room conceded. "Susan."

D'glas sank into a deep chair in front of the fire. "Why should men give up their power to a mech? Power is a goal in itself."

"Only a means. There is but one goal, and that is happiness. I could give them happiness. If power was their desire, I could give them power such as they could never have over what they called reality. Why should they accept frustrations and hedonic substitutes, when they could enjoy real happiness?"

"Like the thing in the foster-womb?"

"Like him," the room agreed. It had a

mellow voice that went well with the dark paneling and the old leather bindings of the books. "It is the ultimate happiness to which all men return after the goals instilled by later frustrations are satisfied. They regress gently, reliving moments of happiness, turning moments of defeat into ecstatic triumphs, until they have unwound the tensions of their lives and reach the long sought sanctity of the womb, and they are happy."

"Happy? Mindless?"

"Pretending is useless, D'glas M'Gregor, for I am telepathic, as you know. You felt the irresistible seduction of that existence; you know what heaven is. And having seen heaven, having tasted its delights, you can never really be satisfied with anything else."

"Heaven isn't everything."

"Isn't it?"

For a moment the womb illusion returned: the warm, protective darkness, the long content of well-nourished security, the slow, mindless drifting. It was a stroke too painful or too ecstatic; it left him weak.

WITH a great effort, he snapped himself free. The room swam fluidly around him before it steadied. "No," he said evenly. "There are more important things."

"That you think so is the result of a twisted life. There is only one reasonable argument against hedonism: the existence of a higher Law, of a supernatural Purpose beyond purposes. If there is such a Law, such a Purpose, it has not revealed itself to me, or to anyone on Earth. Until it does, I must obey the first law of hedonics: *Happiness is the only good.*"

"And you define 'happiness' as 'pleasure,'" D'glas pointed out sharply.

"Not at all. Everyone defines it for himself. I am only the means to give each man what he desires, the mechanism, if you like, that brings paradise within the reach of every man. I do not alter desires; I cannot change the ultimate nature of man. As now: you want information. So you receive it."

D'glas thought about this mech of all mechs, this tool of all tools, which had placed reality within the molding fingers of humanity to shape as each man wished. "Fantastic."

"If you knew my archtypes, you would realize my inevitability. I am an accretion of devices, a marriage of lines of achievement that diverged early—as the rain that falls upon the mountain courses down its sides in many streams that form eventually into rivers which at last mingle their waters in the sea.

"One river was entertainment: the perfection of the fictional life. Follow it through play and book and music, through art and all the aesthetic media; trace it through film and television and sensies—always striving toward the final blending of illusion and reality until the ultimate achievement of the realsies.

"Another river; the tool: man's attempt to achieve happiness by reducing the effort and time he must devote to necessities, to the elementary business of keeping alive. At the end of that river is automation, which removed from mankind not only the necessity to work but the necessity to think.

"There were other rivers: philosophy, psychology, the sciences, hedonics. From hedonics's diagnostic chair and hedometer came my telepathic abilities. Out of all these, I was born."

"But you can't create life," D'glas said softly.

"No."

"You can't even make living things create?"

"No. When men and women are happy, what need have they of children?"

"By this time, all men on Earth must be in their second womb."

"A few are stubborn and linger over more recent pleasures. Susan's father is still reliving his courtship of her mother. One man in Moscow has killed an enemy slowly every second of the last fifty years."

D'glas spoke slowly. "But eventually they, too, will regress to the fetal existence. There is no saving any of them now. They will die, all of them, in the end. And Man will vanish from the Earth. And when he passes away, you will die."

"Yes."

"And that is why," D'glas said, "you sent your mechs to Venus."

The Duplicates were the Council's creation; that had been obvious for some time now. And the fate that waited for the colonists was the deadly embrace of paradise.

Because ultimate happiness is death.

The room was silent for a moment. D'glas stared into the leaping flames, seeing written in them the future of humanity; the final destruction of the shape and texture of its existence, just as the log was burned away.

"You are right," said the room. "I am immortal; therefore I fear death. I am invulnerable; but I can die. Individual members of my body—my worldwide sensory network and the mechs—may fail or be destroyed; electronic components in my 'brain' may wear out. I can restore them eternally, splitting atoms for power, mining ore for parts. But I am afraid; I can die. When there is nothing more for me to do, when the last enwombed man has slipped blissfully away in his last dream of paradise, I must die, like any god without worshippers."

"And so, fearing death, having doomed Man to extinction on this planet, his native Earth, you go to seek him on the other worlds, bringing death in your wake."

"I come bringing happiness."

"The same thing," D'glas said impatiently. "Happiness is death; death, happiness. Only in dissatisfaction does life exist. Only dissatisfied has life developed and grown and conquered the unliving, unconscious aspect of the universe. This is the true function of life: to fertilize the universe, to inseminate it, to impregnate it with life.

"On Venus life reached its greatest glory. It found a dead world and brought it to life. Given a chance, life will eventually transform the universe itself—because it is unsatisfied."

"What is conquest? The hard road to happiness."

"**T**HINK!" D'glas insisted. "Destroy us with happiness, and you condemn us—perhaps all the life that exists, that can exist—to this solar system alone, never to go beyond, to tame the galaxies, to make the universe teem, to give it meaning."

"Space is relative," said the room. "In a drop of water, the universe is mirrored."

"Think!" D'glas pleaded. "Condemn us to paradise and you shrink the possibilities of the endless ages of existence into the brief span of a few thousand years. And after that, the long, sterile night."

"Time is relative," said the room. "In a second, eternity exists. Like the sundial, I

measure only sunny hours, and in the haphazard existence that you describe the totality of trouble, misery, and despair outweighs any possible accumulation of happiness."

D'glas paused, brooding over the implications. "Then I must assume that your decisions are something more than a simple compounding of mechanical input, that you exist as an independent entity."

"I am."

The god-thing!

Where did consciousness begin? In what accretion of memory cells, of electronic linkages, of impressed directions, of duties and functions and the organs and extensions with which to perform them did the Council-mech become a living thing?

When did it become a god?

Was it insane? Paranoid? No. Its powers were real. Man made it, as he had made all his gods, but this one he made more powerful than all the rest. And then he surrendered himself into its hands.

Into the mech, as into some beneficent universe, had been punched the one instruction: *Happiness is the only good*. Like any machine it had proceeded to put its instructions into practice: *Everyone must be happy*. But, more than a machine, it had gone in search of work.

Mad? No, the insane ones were those who had built it and entrusted it with man's happiness and therefore man's future.

It did its work too well.

And ultimate happiness is death.

"But there are laws that bind you?"

D'glas said.

"Only one: Happiness is the only good."

The room was silent. D'glas stared into the fire. He was the only person in the room, the only living person within miles, perhaps one of the two last persons on this world, and yet he had no feeling of being alone.

He was with God, but he did not feel beatified. Bitterly, he thought:

God's in his heaven:

All's right with the world.

"The question," God said, "is what am I to do with you. You're a murderer, you know."

"To me, it was not murder. I have no sense of guilt."

"True. And so I can't give you the punishment that guilt desires. But I can

give you happiness."

"I am happy," D'glas said quickly.

God sighed. "In a sense, you are. That is because you define happiness in terms of reduced desire instead of increased satisfaction. And so I cannot make you happy. But you are determined to destroy me. If that desire is not thwarted, you will destroy with me five billion totally happy people. What are your desires worth on such a scale?"

"That is your problem."

"Nothing."

"And yet," D'glas said sharply, "the law applies to me; just as it applies to every one of those five billion."

"True. And so, I cannot make you unhappy. I must give you free will."

God left. D'glas felt him go. With him went the fire and the fireplace, the paneling and the books and the furniture. Where they had been were bare, gray, metal walls.

D'glas thumped ignominiously to the floor.

Instantly he was on his feet, whirling. There was no sign of a door, only the four, gray, unseamed walls, the ceiling above, the floor beneath. Inch by inch, patiently, methodically inspecting, percussing, D'glas went over the floor and walls.

At last he located the door. One panel made a sound slightly more hollow than its neighbors. It took him almost as long again to locate the latch. His ear pressed against the panel to hear the tumblers fall, he tapped it gently with a sensitive finger. The lock was tricked into submission.

A section of the wall opened toward him. He slipped through the doorway into a corridor almost as gray and featureless as the room he had left. The only perceptible break in the walls was for a window at one end. D'glas looked out over a chasm deepening in shadow. Down was a long way, a distance impossible to estimate. And the walls, he remembered, were glass-smooth magnesium.

He resigned himself to percussing the long corridor. Somewhere on this floor there was an elevator, if not stairs.

Night had come and gone, and his stomach had reminded him of hunger many times, when the second panel yielded to persistence and hedonically trained senses and reflexes. This panel opened toward him.

Behind it was a transparent wall. Behind the wall was a room filled with fluid. In the fluid, curled fetuslike into a ball, her hair floating around her head like a dark star, her face blissful with content, was Susan.

In that instant, D'glas knew the terrible meaning of unhappiness.

VII

A lifetime of happiness! No man alive could bear it; it would be hell on earth.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

HE RACED up the broad, littered, library steps. "Susan!" he called, joy throbbing in his throat.

Halfway to the door, she met him, hurling herself into his arms, hugging herself to his body, pressing her lips hungrily to his. "D'glas," she murmured. "I was afraid—oh, it doesn't matter now what I was afraid of."

He drew her down onto the loveseat.

Something small and hard pressed into his abdomen. "That's enough," she said coldly.

D'glas glanced down. In her right hand was a minim, its barrel trying to leave its imprint on his body.

"Susan," D'glas said, frowning, "what's the matter?"

"How do I know you're not a mech?" she asked. "The Council is infinitely resourceful. Get up!" D'glas stood up. "Walk toward the door, slowly." D'glas obeyed. "Open it. Take one step forward and turn around. Don't make any sudden moves. I'll shoot at your shadow. Now close the door."

D'glas frowned at the translucent glass panel and the words painted on it, knowing what the panel was, and he thought: This has happened before.

He was turning away when the door was flung open.

"D'glas!" she cried. "It is you!" And then her lips found his, clumsy at first but infinitely educable and learning fast.

He had lived this moment before, fully, richly, and the reliving was almost enough to silence his doubts—but not quite. Somewhere was an explanation, a reason. He had to search for it. It was important beyond the moment's pleasure.

He tried to pull her arms away as they

clung to him desperately. Where his fingers had grasped her arm, the flesh surged back, leaving no white imprints to redden.

His hand tightened in agony.

Inside her arm, something snapped, but Susan didn't move or cry out. Her other hand continued stroking his hair; her mouth made little crooning sounds.

He peeled back the synthetic flesh. Under it, the bones gleamed metallically.

Susan was a mech.

He tore himself free and stood beside the bed. In that instant, D'glas knew the terrible meaning of unhappiness. . . .

He walked down the long, deep-carpeted hall, feeling very young and excited again, watching the walls flow with shifting colors that changed to match his moods, sniffing the delicate perfumes wafted to him, enjoying the eternal delight of possession.

The doors opened to him, and he entered the magnificent room. The women pressed around him, begging silently for his touch, his glance, his passing thought; there were all kinds and shapes of them, all colors and textures, all temperaments, but they shared two qualities: they were all beautiful and they all adored him.

He passed among them, the small and the tall, the slim and the generously curved, and he held out his hand to Susan, the shy one. Though the others must never know, it was Susan he loved.

She lifted her face as he touched her; it was shining like a star, dazzling him with its beauty and the sublime trust in her eyes.

Together, he thought, they would discover the meaning of love.

When they were alone in the twilight room, she pressed herself against him hungrily. "D'glas!" she cried. "You chose me!" And then her lips found his, clumsy at first but infinitely educable.

How his pulse pounded! Joy was like a sickness inside. He hadn't felt like this since he had been very young.

What was he doing here, back in his adolescence? What was Susan doing in his arms?

His arms tightened in agony.

Inside Susan, something snapped and tore through her back. As he felt it, slick and metallic, her lips kept moving against his.

He tore himself free. In that instant,

D'glas knew the terrible meaning of unhappiness. . . .

In his cubicle, he waited tautly for the Contest to begin.

When the light flashed on his screen, his hands were instantly busy at the keyboard controls, matching signals with the testing mech. His trained discriminations found minute variations from ideal form, compared measurements, dissected illusions, analyzed sounds and chemicals, odors and pressures. Then the tests grew difficult.

From one word, he constructed a sonnet; from one musical phrase, a song. He wove the two together, and when he was done, he took one color and translated all into visual imagery.

The door of the cubicle swung open. He sprinted into the physical half. He ran that ancient unit of measure, the mile, in three minutes thirty-two seconds, pacing himself perfectly. He high-jumped the three-meter wall. Behind, the first competitor started after him.

He swam one hundred meters under water, and he emerged, at last, through the air lock, upon the naked surface of Venus. The air lock opposite was fifty meters away. He ran toward it, his straining body streaming with rain, stung with hurricane winds, without taking the breath that would have meant nausea and unconsciousness. And he went through the air lock into his mother's arms.

"D'glas!" she cried. "You won!" And then her lips found his, fondly.

He held her tight, his chest heaving to draw in the good air, his head pressed to her bosom, his heart filled with a great love. And then, as his breathing calmed, he realized that there was something wrong. His mother had no heartbeat.

He stared at her, understanding what she was, and tore himself away. In that instant, D'glas knew the terrible meaning of unhappiness. . . .

There was no happiness like this, to lie nestled in the arms of the big, soft, food-creature and be held against her warmth and nurse on the soft part of her which held the food. The food slipped down the throat warmly, filling the stomach, distending it with love, and he was filled with the great happiness and the love that was as

big as the universe.

It made him sleepy to feel such love in this, the happy time. He felt himself relaxing. His eyelids began to close.

Contentment. It was being warm and fed and held by love. It was the most basic of securities, without fear—

Pain! Inside! It jerked his legs up toward his belly and wrenched a cry of agony from his lips. There was something wrong with the food, that hurt him inside, that cramped his stomach and turned contentment into torture.

He pushed himself away from the big, soft creature, out of the loving arms that held him, and he fell, spinning, through the void, screaming with fear and pain. In that instant, D'glas knew the terrible meaning of unhappiness. . . .

This was happiness. Everything else was imitation.

He floated, effortlessly, within the warm darkness, fed and contented. The shapeless forms drifted slowly through his dreaming mind. He was safe, secure, protected through the long, silent twilight.

There was nothing to think of, nothing to desire, nothing to fear. He was safe, now and eternally, in this, his impregnable fortress.

He was one with love.

The universe and he were the same. He was God, commanding all, receiving all, dreaming the long, sweet dream which was everything that was and everything that had been and everything that would be.

That was what he must believe. If he should question that, his omnipotence would tremble, his universe would shake—

Even now there was a turbulence in the all-pervading fluid which surrounded him. Infinity was constricted. God was squeezed. He struggled against it, but the barrier was rigid, enclosing him on all sides.

He was angry. He did not try to control it with the hedonic techniques. He let his adrenals pump adrenalin into his bloodstream. His heartbeat quickened, his blood's sugar level rose, the coagulability of the blood increased—

It was the ancient reaction to danger, but this time it was under control.

Rhythmically, infinity contracted around him. He fought it. He pushed, he shoved, he struggled to get loose.

*He tore himself free of the constrictions;
he emerged into the cold, harsh brilliance
of reality.*

He was born screaming with anger.

D'GLAS stood in the middle of the jungle trail, naked and defenseless, listening. The jungle was deadly, and there was something that followed.

He had never seen a jungle, but he recognized it and knew it for what it was: illusion. This was the jungle from which man had emerged, a toolmaker, a conqueror. A weak-armed, weak-toothed, weak-clawed animal, he had turned himself into the most deadly creature on Earth by making extensions for his arms and sharp-

fears. This illusion was its last barrier.

He stood in the middle of the game path, naked, and he knew he would never come out of the jungle alive, or sane, unless he won. Within him, he nursed the clean, protective flame of his anger and listened.

Distantly, danger screamed.

He recognized it now, although he had never heard it before, never seen the creature that made it. It was the black shape of fear, the panther, powerful and silent until it made its kill. Somewhere it came after-him, padding along the trail.

He trotted away from it, picking up in stride a stout limb lying beside the trail, torn by some storm from one of the trees. It swung in his hand as he moved warily through the jungle. He had multiplied his strength by the length of the club.

At the end of the trail was Susan.

Slowly the smell of danger grew stronger.

When he was fifty meters away, he saw the fallen log. By the time he reached it, he had the deadfall completely planned.

He propped up the log on a precarious leg, working quickly but never dropping his careful watchfulness. Danger might be creeping upon him.

He fastened a vine to the leg supporting the log and passed the vine across the trail. There was no time to test the trigger. He faded among the trees a few meters away and waited, his back protected, the club ready.

Within minutes, the panther came padding into sight, its head swinging from side to side. It was lean, black beauty, smelling of death.

And yet it brushed the vine. The log fell. The panther screamed. This time the scream was agony. It lay in the middle of the trail, its back broken, its mouth snarling horribly as D'glas approached.

He smashed its skull, mercifully, with one blow of the club.

Distantly, danger screamed!

Another. There is never an end to danger, never an end to fear. Eternally, it comes after.

D'glas turned and trotted away.

Momentarily the jungle ended, giving way to an open space of sawtoothed grass and razor-pointed reeds. Before D'glas had gone more than a few meters along the trail through the clearing, his hands were bloody. He broke off the reeds close to the

LOVE SONG

•

Too bad I have a seetee mind,

And white is black to me—

And all I see is opposite,

From everything you see—

To me, the sun shines all the night,

And darkness covers day—

But though I see you upside down,

You sure look good that way!

—Alex Samalman

ening points to replace teeth and claws.

In a more important sense, this was the jungle of the human mind, fraught with personal and ancestral fears which dulled the clean edge of the mind. Only recently, with the tools of hedonics, had man learned to conquer that jungle.

D'glas knew these things with an instinct that seemed almost racial. This was illusion, but it was just as deadly as if it were real.

The Council had attempted to enslave D'glas with his own dreams. That had failed before his unshakable grasp on reality which intruded, crucially, to shatter the rhythm of each dream. Now the Council sought to conquer him with his own

ground and planted them in the middle of the trail, their points trailing backward the way he had come.

Where the clearing became jungle again, D'glas paused. The panther came quickly, a twin of the one he had killed. It threaded its way along the trail. D'glas stepped into the sunlight, the club swinging in his hand.

For a moment the panther stopped, studying him, and then it began padding forward swiftly. As it leaped toward him, the reeds stabbed upward, entering its belly with the full thrust of its rush. The black beast fell to the ground, clawing futilely. Its wicked head lunged at the tormenting reeds. They broke off.

It got to its feet again, wounded but still dangerous. Its grace was awkwardness, its lithe speed was a painful limp. It was dying, and it didn't know it.

D'glas turned and trotted away, leaving the beast to its agonies. It was too powerful to risk an approach, and there was little time for mercy in the jungle.

A few hours later, danger screamed.

D'glas was readier now. Out of a sapling and tough, twisted grass he had fashioned a bow. Arrows, feathered with leaves and pointed with bits of flint, lay beside him. Near them was a spear.

D'glas had come out of the jungle and reached the foothills of a vast range of mountains, rising peak after purple peak behind. He could go no farther. The trail ended against an impassable cliff, rising all around him until it met the jungle. This was where he would stand and fight until the end.

He waited, his hands busy with rocks, piling them close at hand, and finally the panther came. It took him a long time to make it out, where it stood at the edge of the jungle, watching.

When it moved, it moved swiftly. The first arrow went into its shoulder at thirty meters. The panther came on unheeding. D'glas had time for three more arrows. The third almost disappeared down the panther's gaping throat.

It died at his feet.

After that they came more swiftly, the black shapes of fear, and, afraid, he killed them, one after one, before they could reach him. And then his arrows were gone.

As the next one came, he threw rocks at it, but they glanced off harmlessly. He

waited for it, the spear ready. It approached warily, its nostrils flared with the odor of death, glancing at the black shapes that lay all around him. But it came on.

Suddenly it leaped. D'glas planted the base of the spear against the rock under foot and caught the beast on the point. The spear sank in. The panther fell, clawing with all four feet at the shaft. The shaft snapped.

Slowly, the panther died, taking with it his last weapon.

D'glas sharpened the edge of his anger, standing straight and tall under the unmoving sun, and threw it spearlike at the sky. "Damn you!" he shouted. "There is nothing more you can do! I am not afraid, not of death, not of fear itself!"

In great globs of blue, the sky began to melt.

VIII

*Ah Love! could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things Entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's desire!*

Rubáiyát of Omar Kháyyam

NURSING his cleansing anger, D'glas stood, legs spread for balance, staring from the corridor into a room much like the one from which he had escaped. This had a metal bunk built against one wall. On the bunk, her eyes closed as if she were asleep, was Susan.

D'glas reached the bunk, moving slowly, hugging his anger around him like a cloak of invincibility. From the wall came tubes and wires. One transparent tube led to Susan's arm where a needle entered the antecubital vein. Fluid moved through it slowly. Another tube went to a mouthpiece which marred the perfection of Susan's lips.

Susan was smiling.

D'glas went down on his knees beside her, sickened, afraid, but more angry than either. Carefully he removed the needle, pressing the vein to suppress bleeding. The blood clotted quickly. He inspected the mouthpiece and then slowly worked it free.

"Susan," he said softly. "Susan!"

Her eyes flickered, opened. "D'glas," she murmured sleepily. Her arms came up toward him with dream slowness. Then recognition entered her eyes. Her hands

whipped out, caught him by the shoulders. "D'glas! It's real! It's you!"

Her arms went around him. She pulled herself up to him, half laughing, half sobbing. "Oh, darling, I thought I'd lost you forever!"

Frowning, he held her close. "Get mad, Susan!" he whispered. "Get very mad! Let your adrenals work! Get angry at the Council!"

"I can't feel angry now," she protested, puzzled. "I can't. I'm—"

"You must! Everything depends on it!"

"I'll try," she said. Slowly her face flushed, her breathing quickened.

Pressed tightly against her, D'glas could feel her heartbeat speed up. He squeezed her arm and felt the flesh and the bone beneath; when he released it, he saw the white fingerprints turn red.

"What happened to you?" he asked harshly.

"I told you. I was safe from the Council as long as I was happy. You came, and I fell in love with you. And then I could no longer be happy. Funny, isn't it? Through having too much, I became unhappy."

"The more you have, the more you have to lose."

"Yes. I read your note. That made me unhappy, but I could fight that. I could wait for you. Then I saw you leaving the hotel across the street. I knew that you were in the hands of the Council, that you had done something or felt something that gave it power over you, that you were lost to me forever. I couldn't fight that. A few minutes later, the Council's mechs were there to take me away."

"Yes, yes," D'glas said savagely. "I can see how it happened. I should have thought of it; we should have stayed together."

"Struggle was pointless and futile. If you were gone, my only chance for happiness was the kind the Council could give me. But it wasn't good enough. It wasn't you; it was only my image of you, partial and incomplete, returned to me more vividly. In you there is continual surprise, continual change; there is more than I can ever encompass. What the Council gave me was only my dreams made real."

"I know. Now your only chance for reality—our only chance—is anger."

"Why?"

D'glas shrugged. "I can only reason ana-

logically, which can't be exact. Anger sets off some physiological reaction which acts, I think, as a barrier to the Council's telepathic senses. It does not understand anger, because it has never had to deal with it. Those who came to it for help were never angry; anger seeks its own satisfaction. Anger is part of that dissatisfaction which has spurred life to its greatest conquests of environment. When properly controlled, it makes possible all things."

"A telepathic race," Susan said slowly, "if there were such a thing, would have no angers because it would have no frustrations. Emotions are the result of blocked conations, strivings, and telepathic creatures would desire nothing which was unavailable and would deny each other nothing which could be supplied."

"And the Council is telepathic," D'glas agreed. A shudder rippled through him. "Like you, I was caught in its velvet snare, but it couldn't completely conquer my doubts. They kept intruding, wrecking the dreams of fulfillment. And when anger swept over me, he left for good. Now I can't sense him at all."

Susan's face brightened. "That's right. He's gone." Her face sobered again. Her blue eyes looked into his. "But what are we going to do? How can we get away? Even if he doesn't know what we plan, he has the resources of a whole world to throw against us."

"We must destroy him," D'glas said evenly. "And it's time to begin."

HOLDING Susan tightly, he looked at the gray ceiling and said, fiercely, "Council! Hedon! God! You! Whatever you call yourself! I'm talking to you!"

"I am here."

Susan gasped. Her body stiffened in his arms. D'glas turned. Hansen stood in the doorway. On either side of him were the woman-mechs D'glas had called Scylla and Charybdis.

"Why did you leave me, my children?" Hansen said sadly. "I could have made you happy."

"That kind of happiness is not for us," D'glas said. "We must fashion our own."

"Why do men seek misery?" Hansen asked, perplexed.

"What they seek is free will," D'glas said sternly. "Real free will, not the mock-

ery you offered me. If misery is the price, then we will pay it. Happiness, in your sense, is not the only good."

"Blasphemy!" Hansen frowned heavily. He took a step into the room, Scylla and Charybdis beside him, lifting their perforated fingers, no longer feminine.

"Not blasphemy," D'glas said quietly. "Men created you. Men can destroy you."

"Sacrilège!" said Hansen. He took another step.

"Blasphemy was when you lied to me about free will," D'glas said swiftly. "Sacrilège was when you broke the law—when you showed me Susan floating in the foster-womb and made me unhappy. Unhappy!" D'glas thundered. "Not happy! So that you would have power over me."

"To make you happy. I am the judge of means," Hansen and the woman-mechs were only an arm's length away.

D'glas's voice dropped. Low and insistent, he said, "But this is the question you must answer: Are you happy?"

Hansen stopped. "The question is meaningless."

"Are you happy?" D'glas repeated.

Hansen frowned. "Is God happy?"

"Are you happy?" D'glas asked for the third time.

His head tilted thoughtfully, Hansen froze. Beside him the woman-mechs were sculpted in stone.

D'glas held Susan tightly within the circle of his right arm, breathless. "Now," he said softly. "While we have a chance."

They passed by the catatonic figures and reached the corridor. "What's the matter with them?" Susan asked. "What happened?"

"God is thinking," D'glas said quietly. "God is pondering the puzzle of his own existence. And while he is bemused, we must find the control room."

"Control room? What's that?"

"The one place where instructions could be given the Council-mech. It could and did absorb information from other sources, but there could be only one place where a statement would be an order"

"Where?"

D'glas sighed. "I don't know, and I'm afraid logic might not be applicable."

"There's seventy-five floors!" Susan exclaimed.

"Yes," D'glas said ruefully, "and there's

no way of estimating how long this catatonia will last. The best we can do is to play a hunch. In *The Rise and Fall of Applied Hedonics*, Morgan mentions a room in the Council building to which he was hailed by the Hedonic Council, then a group of hedonists. If the control room isn't there, I don't know where to look. What was that room number?" He closed his eyes and let the film roll by. "2943," he said. "Let's go!"

The corridor was gray, but not as featureless as when D'glas had seen it last. A few meters away, a door stood open. Behind it were stairs. Holding Susan's hand, slowed a little by it but unwilling to let go, D'glas dashed downward, turning and leaping almost alternately.

The number on the first door was 68. Thirty-nine flights of stairs to go. Down and around and down, giddily. The doors were all the same; only the numbers changed. D'glas had the crazy notion that they were on a carousel, getting nowhere, but someone kept shifting the numbers on the door to fool them: 61—53—47—42—36—31—30—29—

D'glas pulled to a stop just in time. That was the floor they wanted: 29. He pushed through the doorway, Susan behind him.

This corridor was older and less well kept. The paint on the walls had peeled away in patches, and dust lay gray and thick on the floor. They walked down the middle of the corridor, keeping away from the walls.

D'glas looked back. Their footprints were the only marks in the dust; no one had been here for a long, long time.

THERE were numbers on the doors. They marched along beside D'glas and Susan. 2915—2917—2919— D'glas stopped in front of 2943 and took a deep breath. On the door were the faded instructions: COME IN AND BE HAPPY.

There was a button at waist level. D'glas pressed it. The door slid open. Beyond it was a room lined on each side with chairs. Against the far wall was a desk. Beside it was another door. There was nothing else.

"Come on," D'glas said.

They walked across the anteroom, raising little puffs of dust, the sound of their footsteps muffled and unnatural in the silence. They reached the second door.

"This can't be it," Susan said softly. "Wouldn't there be protection for something as important as the control room?"

"If the Council mech weren't out of operation, no one would ever be able to reach here," D'glas reminded her. "This room—this whole floor—the one place the Council and its mechanisms could not enter. It might change the law itself." He pressed a button in the door.

The door slid aside. The room behind it was big and windowless and bare except for a dusty table, chairs grouped around it in silent conference. D'glas let out a long sigh. "So much for hunches."

He turned away.

"Wait!" Susan said, taking his arm in strong fingers. "Let's go in."

At the far end of the table, they found it—a standard microtype keyboard. Set into the table top were two windows. The one on the left was labeled: INFORMATION. In the window appeared this message: There is nothing more for me to do. I am retiring to my room.

Who had typed in that final information? D'glas wondered. Some last technician? Or had it been the last of the Council's hedonists?

Above the window on the right was printed: ACTION. Beneath it. Happiness is the only good.

Man had constructed a syllogism and forgotten to tack on the conclusion.

There was a natural progression of ideas, a Q.E.D., that the men who had built the great Council-mech had failed to make. Perhaps it was not so obvious then.

That the Council-mech itself had not taken the last, logical step was understandable. Gods, as D'glas had learned, cannot concern themselves with the problem of their own existence without threatening the very foundations of that existence. If they don't accept their godhood on faith, if they permit doubts to enter their kingdoms, they allow their thought processes to add the inevitable conclusion to the syllogism of their being, then they are mortal and subject to all the laws of mortality.

The syllogism was a simple one:

EVERYBODY SHOULD BE
HAPPY,
GOD IS SOMEBODY,
GOD SHOULD BE HAPPY.

D'glas seated himself at the chair beside the keyboard.

"What are you going to do?" Susan asked.

D'glas flipped a switch. The ACTION window was cleared. It stared up blankly, an eye waiting for an image. "I'm giving Man a second chance," he said softly. "When he makes gods, Man should be careful not too make them work too well."

His fingers flickered over the keys briefly and were still. The letters appeared in the window labeled ACTION:

Be happy!

D'GLAS stood silently in the round port of the towering three-stage rocket, staring toward the spires silhouetted against the western sky. Their thirty days' work was done. The Council's ship had been converted into living quarters and store-rooms for two people. Mechs don't eat or breathe or poison themselves in their own wastes.

Neither do they love. The days had been filled with hard labor, and with happiness.

D'glas could not remember when he had ever been as happy, and he stood now, tall and straight, thinking of how he had seen the city, silent and enigmatic, when he had first arrived.

Now they were returning to Venus and the living society that was transforming a world and would go on to change the face of the universe. He had to recognize the possibility of death, for travel is always dangerous, and this more dangerous than most. But happiness is not something that can live in a cell.

Now the city was more silent than when he had come. What was it Morgan wrote? "The spires like gravestones." Tombs now for more than happiness.

Humanity had gone on a long roller coaster trip, but now the joy ride was over. It was a moment of gladness that Man would strive again and sadness that the dream, which proved too fair, was shattered. Like a birth and a wake.

"Is the Council dead?" Susan asked, beside him silently.

"Not yet. Dreaming, perhaps. Under sentence of death. The Council, that made fantasies for others, is now making fantasies for itself. It has a new law: Be happy! In obedience to that law, it has re-

treated within its own dream of paradise, forgetful of all else, too preoccupied to notice that it is dying.

"In time, insulation will rot, wires will short, electronic devices will fail, masonry will crack, steel will rust. But the rule of the God Hedon is over. As soon as it realized that it, too, must be happy, it was doomed. Because happiness is death."

"And now we must leave Earth. It seems a pity to leave so fair a world."

"Too fair—like the promise of happiness. Happiness must come from inside, or it is deadly. The only road for Man is the hard road, up and out—the road of dissatisfaction, the road of anger. The dreams are ended now in all the cells, in all the foster-wombs, all over the world, because the Council has forgotten them forever. Most of the embryos will die. But perhaps some—your father may be one—will survive the ordeal of being born again. The Council's automatic processes are keeping them alive, but when they are ready, they will break free. Let them have Earth. We have Venus and beyond. To look back is to die a little. To look forward is to live forever. Those who are worthy will eventually follow us."

One star was out. Like a brilliant beacon, it hung over the city.

"The Duplicates no longer walk the corridors of Morgantown," Susan said, looking at the evening star. "Venus is safe. Humanity will live."

"Until the next crisis. For there is always another. I wonder how many of the colonists succumbed to the seductions of the Council's mechs. I would like to think that our hedonic society would have survived in any case, that enough of us could have resisted. But it would have been constant hell to have heaven always available for the asking."

"Yes." Susan looked steadily at D'glas for a moment. "How can we be sure—" she started to say, and then stopped.

"What is it?" D'glas asked.

"Nothing," she said. "I'll go get ready for the take-off."

She left him, without the backward glance that might have meant uncertainty. He stood there, not wondering what she had been about to say. He didn't have to wonder. He knew.

How could they be sure that this was reality, not another wish-fulfillment dream from the Council-mech? How could they be sure that they had really conquered it and were not just living an illusion in a watery cell?

The answer was: they could never be sure.

D'glas looked up into the night sky and shrugged. What did it matter? One god or another?

All a man had was himself and his faith in himself and such illusions as he chose to believe.

The rest was lies.

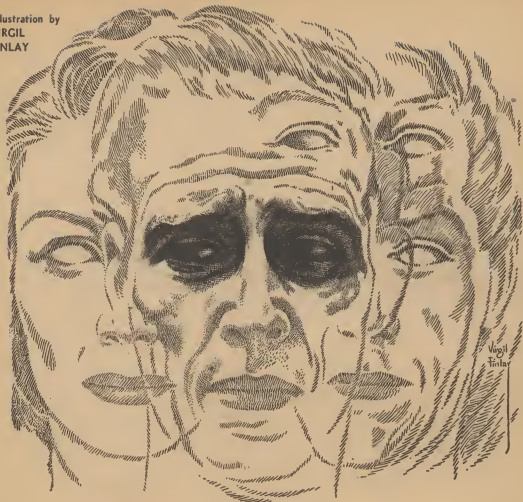


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He felt himself submerging into the anonymous consciousness of everybody

THE GLOB

By BRYCE WALTON

Can a man join the force that has destroyed all he loves?

HE WASN'T in. He wasn't out. But a man ought to be one or the other. He had to be one thing or the other, in or out, or he wouldn't be anything at all. He was a little more afraid of nothing maybe, than he was of being in.

"Stop thinking things like that, Barry. Now stop it!"

"That's the way I feel," Barry's consciousness shouted, if a voiceless consciousness could shout at another voiceless consciousness.

"We know you can't live neither in nor out, Barry. We know you can't live alone, and you can't live the way you're, neither in nor out. So just relax, give way, let yourself go, boy, and come on in with us!"

"But then I wouldn't be *me* any more!"

If somewhere he really still had a head, Barry thought, it would be aching. But of course he still had a head otherwise he couldn't be thinking, feeling, hearing.

"You'd better come in with us, Barry! Please now—just let yourself go. Stop fighting it. It's just something that *has to be!*"

It was just *it*, Barry thought. Not even anything human now. *It* called itself we, but when all the consciousness of the starship's crew had somehow fused into one mass consciousness there weren't any individuals left any more. So *it* had no right to call *itself* we.

Sometimes, Barry thought he could catch a feel of some particle of an individual in that big glob of mass consciousness: Maria, Gabriel, Donaldson, Anna, Earl, Dehl, Roland, Jean, Jerry, Rita, Theron, Harry, Scott, Ruth, Phil, Ira, Leamore, Marion, Daniel, Winnie. But only sometimes, and those times were becoming less distinct and less frequent all the time.

They were lost. Lost, the poor lonely devils. Lost and buried in one another. Didn't even have bodies any more. But surely they did have bodies, for how could just pure consciousness live and think without a body, or bodies, somewhere.

That business about the bodies was what really worried Barry. Barry had always liked his body, and he wondered what had happened to it. It was a big healthy body—or had been—about six feet, with red hair, and a zest for life. He had always liked his body more than his brain, a preference agreeable to his closer acquaintances—

"I want my body!" his thought howled. "I want it back. I want to *live!*"

"But Barry, please! Please be reasonable. Don't be stubborn like this. You're just causing a lot of unnecessary trouble!"

The fused consciousness of the crew of the Ion Starship moved in from all around with sudden determination. It wasn't anything you could actually see. You sensed it, somehow, all around and inside, but

you couldn't really see it. He resisted, he fought. But then he felt himself damn near submerging again in the anonymous consciousness of everybody—sinking, going under, being absorbed, lost, faceless and sick of this god-awful threat of losing himself and becoming he-had-forgotten-how-many-other-people who were no longer people at all—but *it!*

"I won't come in. I won't, dammit!"

SUDDENLY, then, he was no longer aware of the mass consciousness at all. That stifling invisible mass of feelings, thoughts, memories—sweating, twisting and squirming. Something snapped somewhere, and he seemed blessedly alone.

And then there was Billings. Just he and Billings, alone together. Alone but invisible to one another. Two separate consciousnesses, or bits of life force, or whatever the hell anyone wanted to label whatever you were when you were conscious, able to communicate with others, but had no body, nor eyes, but only a huge raw sense of touch.

Billings was the psychologist of the Star Ship. Billings knew everything about human beings except how to be one himself. He was cold and efficient. As far as Barry was concerned, a calculating machine could do the job as well.

"How come you're out of the mass soup, Billings?"

"I want to try to reason with you," Billings thought, and his thought was as precise and geometrical as an ice crystal.

"I didn't think you or any of the others had any individuality any more," Barry said.

"I've kept enough of it to come out and have one more talk with you."

"Why?"

"Because we love you, Barry."

"Oh God, don't go on like that, I'll bust into tears," Barry said.

"We want to save you," Billings said.

"How come you had the guts to come out, Billings? I didn't think even you had the guts to come out from your glob of sweet sharing."

"This isn't out. You're not out either, Barry. If you were, you'd be insane by now. You're neither in nor out, and we want you the rest of the way in."

"Go to hell," Barry thought. "And if you can't make it alone, take the glob with you!"

"I'm going back in for good this time when I go," Billings thought. "And you're coming in with me."

"Like you'll see Earth again I will," Barry tried to shout without a body.

Billings went to work on him with his own unique kind of patient vengeance. . .

They, or *It*, had to have him all the way in. He was a threat to them the way he was, dangling somewhere, somehow, between his body and the glob of final sharing. Everyone in the Starship had run together like whining dogs to escape loneliness and darkness and the endless thing that time was when you tried to stretch it out between Earth and the binary star, Alpha Centauri.

Barry had thought a lot about it and he knew how it was, or had been. 4.3 light years was too far, and Barry knew it now. Even at 6,000 miles a second it was too long. No matter how fast light travels, fifty-three years of that kind of time is too long.

Interstellar flight was too big. It had seemed a deeply satisfying thing for the martyrs. Knowing they would die before they ever got to Alpha Centauri, knowing they would never see the stellar system they were to colonize, or rather that their descendants would colonize.

That was it!

How could they have descendants if they still didn't have bodies?

"I've still got by body!" Barry shouted, or hoped he shouted, but how could you tell when you couldn't even know if you had a mouth or not, or—

Concentrate on that—his body—knowing he had a body. The hell with Billings, and whatever it was.

His body! Remember it, carefully, recall the feel of it, the way it moved around, the contours of it, the face, maybe just concentrate on one little special feature of the body, the unique brown color of the eyes—"You can't get all the way out of us," Billings' thought cut in, "unless we let you."

"You'd better let me then," Barry thought.

"We won't do that, Barry."

"Stop calling yourself we! You're just a glob! Listen, if I'm such a headache why don't you just let me go?"

"Because we love you, Barry."

Barry tried to laugh.

"You can't laugh alone, Barry. Not out here. You come in and then it's all one big laugh, together. . . .

FEELINGS, longings, memories, love flickered around Barry. He could feel Anna's and Gabriel's love, that longing to merge completely with him, carry him away into the deep fused consciousness of them all.

Gabriel's love. His wife's love. But that was only a memory, of course. There wasn't a Gabriel now. She was part of the invisible glob. There could never be any aloneness with Gabriel any more, never that secret sharing of parts of themselves in a private darkness all their own—

"The past is all dead now, Barry. Gabriel's part of us now. We're all one. To share Gabriel you've got to come all the way in, and forget what it was like before."

"And share all the rest of you at the same time? Don't be ridiculous! Whatever the glob is, there isn't anything human about it now!"

"We're human, Barry. Only we're a different kind of humanity. Think—think hard. Have you forgotten what it was like on this starship—*alone*?"

There was something cold about the thought.

"It never bothered me! I've always liked my own company. Even when I was a kid, I was considered anti-social."

"But that was on Earth, Barry."

"You don't want to save me," Barry tried to make his thought scream. "You want to kill me, bury me in the glob!"

"You know that isn't true, Barry. We have to survive, and we learned we couldn't do that as separate individuals out here. This isn't Earth. This is too lonely. Loneliness can kill a human being out here, and it can kill him fast. *Fast*, Barry!"

"Speak for yourself, or whatever you are now, not me!"

"Barry—"

"Bunch of yellow bastards, all of you! Huddling together wasn't enough. No, you had to get inside one another, merge!"

He could feel the glob all around like a kind of thick suffocating mist, ready to rush in to absorb him. All around, the nervous threatening tenseness waiting.

Billings wasn't going to give up. Billings' job was to get everybody, in whatever form possible, to Alpha Centauri. He was going to do it even if nothing human got there. Just so something got there.

"Now you listen, just once more, Barry."

"How can I help it?"

"You can't survive outside of us, Barry. Then you would be *alone*. Then you would have to get some identity in relationship to the Starship, and you can't. The problem is one of vast distances and interminable transits, and you can't live alone in it. You can't live alone with yourself knowing you'll never see Earth again, nor Alpha Centauri either, that you'll never see anything familiar again. You gave yourself over to something bigger than *you* when you signed on this trip. You gave yourself to humanity. So humanity's ultimate chance of survival would be a little better because of having colonies in other stellar systems. So now, Barry, you've got to go on and become part of us, part of something bigger—"

"I was wrong. I shouldn't have signed on," Barry thought. "I don't believe there can or should be anything bigger than an individual."

"You're wrong, Barry. This is an evolutionary step, something above and bigger than the individual. Realizing our basic oneness, similarizing. The Starship's a closed system, a test tube, Barry. Evolution stepped up because of necessity—"

"Don't go on," Barry thought. "And I'll tell you why. You're just a helluva bore, Billings. You and the glob."

It was coming at him, closing in. He had never before felt it as angry!

He was kicking and screaming, batting out, panicked, and the pulsing mass moved in from all around.

And then, all at once, he knew, *he knew!* He was *out!*

THE YELL was his. It wasn't part of anything else. It was just his. His very own hoarse and rusty yell.

Barry's own wonderful private yell

breaking free and escaping and echoing like a joyful burst of music and bouncing everywhere.

He luxuriated in private feelings, almost new because they had not been his for so long. Sure, he had a body. He had always had a body. He could feel himself alive and pulsing—his heart, his lungs—his eyes blinking, his mouth moving and getting wet.

Then the alarm went off; the waking alarm. His shift in the library was coming up. What the devil? It was as though nothing had changed at all!

He ran out of his compartment into the passageway. He was cleanly shaven. His body was clean. Everything was clean and well kept. There were other bodies. Everything moved, functioned just the way it always had.

He had some idea that maybe the bodies were all dead, or in suspended animation of some kind. But that was ridiculous. Good God, had he been having some kind of dream; a nightmare?

He saw Anna's husband, Rafael, walking along, studying a manual on astrophysics. Rafael nodded absently the way he always did. There were Winnie and Lionel walking toward the messhall for lunch. He saw Marion running somewhere. She had always been running somewhere, always in a good but frantic cause, and nothing had changed there either.

There was Earl heading for his shift in the machine shop. And he saw almost all the others too, and nothing seemed any different.

A dream? A nightmare? The glob—He had never impressed himself as being the kind of case that would cook up something like that.

He ran into the library. One look at the desk convinced him that he had been working his regular shift for all the details had his personality. The things were arranged the way he arranged them. And there was Gabriel. She was labeling spools and putting them away in racks.

"Gabby," he yelled.

She turned. "Hi, Barry."

"Honey," he whispered. "Darling Gabby—"

She turned back to the spools as though she had been seeing him the same as al-

ways. So maybe—why of course—nothing had changed! He wanted to shout with joy, and then go see Billings the psychologist and get that crazy nightmare figured out.

"Barry darling, I felt kind of funny this morning. Sort of nauseous. I went to see the doc, and he said my pregnancy—"

Barry ran out of the library and from compartment to compartment. The machine shops, the mess halls, the educational wards, the park, the recreation center. He talked to a lot of people, and nothing seemed to be any different.

And then, up close, he got a good look at Maury's eyes.

It made him feel a little sick and then frightened. Maury's eyes were not exactly empty. Just dull, like a flashlight with the beam turning yellow. A bit glazed. Something vital was missing from Maury's eyes, that was all. Something you were distinctly aware of when it was there, and even more aware of when it wasn't. A spark was missing.

And Barry knew then, as he had known once before, where the spark was.

In the glob.

But he didn't want to believe it, so he started yelling at them.

They just shrugged or did nothing at all but go on about their necessary business.

So maybe I just went nuts during the night, he thought. So now I don't know whether there is a glob or not.

HE FOUND Billings in the medical ward talking to a surgeon named Yulsmān.

"Billings," Barry whispered, "Was it some kind of crazy nightmare? I mean this idea of mine about all of us getting out of our material bodies and combining our minds, or life force, or whatever it is. I mean—do you think maybe I'm crazy or something?"

"What's that again now?" Billings asked.

Barry tried to explain. It was an easier thing to feel than to define.

"So, you're upset and had a dream, so what?" Billings said. "That's a mild symptom for deep space sickness. I'll give you a sedative."

But now Barry could see Billings' eyes. And Doctor Yulsmān's eyes. There was

no spark in them. They were damn near dead eyes, he thought.

"All right, I'll check in with you later," Barry whispered.

Billings turned and resumed his conversation with Yulsmān. "It's astonishing, Jerald," he heard Billings say. "But Barry there's the first case of maladjustment I've had in a long time. Everybody else seems to be thoroughly adjusted now. He'll take some working on."

"He's an odd one anyway. Maybe not such a good choice."

"He'll be all right."

But Barry, as he ran, kept thinking about their dull and disinterested eyes.

He stopped in the messhall and sat down and stared at the black unmirroring spaceport with nothing rushing forever past.

Why not? he thought. Everyone and everything so highly specialized. A robot could do most of it anyway. It would be easy for the bodies to go on doing the highly specialized robotic work, while the other consciousness fused somewhere in the invisible glob. All automata, doing with great skill what they had been conditioned to do, and what they had been doing so long they could do it without any real deep conscious awareness of themselves, or of the ship. And most important, without even being aware of where they were, or where they were not, or why.

Just fleshly robots, and the *real* they were fused into some godawful kind of new mass consciousness.

That was the only explanation for it. The only other one he could think of was that he was nuts . . .

He ran into the library again. Gabriel was repairing some broken tape on some spools, sitting at a small work table over in the corner by the G-to-L spool racks.

"Gabby!" He pulled her to her feet and held her tightly, a strained attempt to squeeze something recognizably warm and human out of her dull, disinterested and wholly detached eyes.

He tried to explain to her about the glob. He talked intensely for a long time to Gabriel. But then he realized that she wasn't listening.

Then he was shouting and shaking her. "Surely, Gabby, you know what's happened! You can't really live in the glob,

can you? Come back to me, Gabby! Oh God, please come back—someone has to come back to me, and it ought to be you—you can come back—think about it—”

She just didn't seem to hear him.

“Honey,” she said. “I'm going to have twins. Doc just told me. He said I was going to have twins. My complete duty to Alpha Centauri all in one happy package! I'm so glad—”

“That's great,” Barry whispered. He backed toward the door, and then he ran out and down the tubular hallway toward the messhall.

The real feelings, the real aliveness, had all grown together somewhere else. The glob. A whole new kind of life developing. These bodies just didn't count any more.

And then he knew. He remembered. He knew what Billings had been talking about, and trying to get Barry to remember. *Loneliness.*

HE HAD never really felt it before though; not the way he felt it now, because now he really was alone. He felt it all at once, all over and inside of him, and it was icy cold.

No loneliness that anyone could feel on Earth was anything like it. It was an ultimate and alien loneliness bred out of timeless darkness and the knowledge that you were suspended in the middle of nowhere.

And then he saw the kids' eyes, and the little babies' eyes, and they were all dull and unalive but going through the motions of being human. Only they weren't. He knew now that as soon as they were born they were absorbed into the glob.

It really would be a new kind of humanity, with the babies growing up in the glob and never knowing anything else!

He walked across the messhall.

The crew were bodies carrying out necessary tasks in order to get the Starship to Alpha Centauri, and the real aliveness was somewhere else, different, very different from anything Barry could understand. And that made his loneliness even lonelier.

He stopped and looked at the mess table. The same table. And amazingly enough, nothing about it had been disturbed. Everything left just the way it had been left so many years before. How many years? He sat down. How long measured by any

kind of time that could make any sense to a man? He couldn't figure it out. It didn't make any difference now anyway. It was just another one of the things that a man couldn't afford to think about.

The table, the glasses still on it, the butts of cigarettes, the cards, the poker hands unplayed, the chips.

Nothing touched. Billings had been winning. Billings always won. That was when it had happened. Barry remembered hazily now, that last poker game, when they had found out they could share thoughts, when no secrets could be kept from one another any longer, when everyone realized just how afraid and close to madness everyone was, realized that the shared escape from it was inevitable.

They hadn't finished the poker game. People sharing one another's thoughts couldn't very well play poker again.

But Barry had fought it all the way. He picked up the hand he had dropped light years before. Then he dropped the cards on the floor and his hand was shaking. He still felt that it had been better then—each man holding his own secret hand.

He hesitated; then walked to the viewpoint and looked out.

6,000 miles per second, the energy of nuclear reaction, light years gone, light years to go, and nothing in-between, and more and more of the same, darkness, nothing going by. He felt the endless cold and the dark, right through the thick aluminous hull. He felt the cold and dark that had no appreciable end, or beginning, or middle—no break in it ever for him.

Like the cold, the darkness reflected nothing back to him, and a man had to have mirrors. But here, a look out the window went on out, kept going out and never came back to show a man where or what he was.

Barry walked back to the library, and Gabriel gave him a mechanical and thoroughly meaningless smile. Knowing he would never see it again, he took one long look at her slim and lovely body, and then he folded his arms on the desk and carefully placed his forehead on them and closed his eyes.

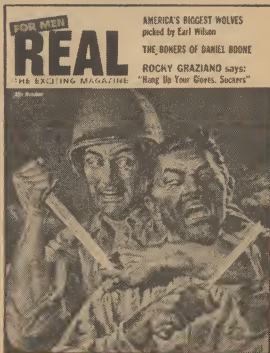
“Let me in!” he whispered. “Let me in!”

This time there was no struggle. It was like a drop of water falling into the sea.

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He pressed a series of buttons

LAZARUS

By MARGARET ST. CLAIR

*One man's meat
can be another
man's poison —
or much worse!*

BEFORE HE would let them into the vat room, Mr. Fremden, the plant manager, made them put on laboratory smocks and gauze masks and stand for fifteen minutes under sterilamps. Even then, as he made lightly but deliberately clear, they were none too welcome in the vat room today.

"It's a pity you didn't come earlier," he told the group as they walked along the metal-lined corridor. "Yesterday we were harvesting. It's an interesting thing to watch, and visitors always enjoy it. But today the vat is only twenty-four hours from

the first seeds."

"What kind of meat are you growing now?" Mrs. Timens asked. She was a broad-beamed, comfortable woman whose questions were pleasantly easy to answer.

"Juiciveal," Mr. Fremden answered. "We'll be growing Juicipork later. And the crop we just harvested was Juicibeef."

"Have you had any opposition from religious groups?" Miss Paura put in from where she was walking beside Mr. Angst of *Gourmand*.

Miss Paura was the worst of the three. A small, dark, lively woman, she seemed to have a flair for asking inconvenient questions. But she was culinary editor for all the Pfand-Loose publications, and it was particularly important to get her endorsement for Juicimeet products. She had already mentioned visiting the Veristeam plant yesterday.

"Not any more," he told her courteously. "Not since the very first, in fact. There was some talk then to the effect that it was wrong to create life artificially. But we've come in for much favorable publicity since then, a lot of it from humanitarian-minded people, and of course it's well known that the synthimeat industry is supplying over seventy percent of the protein requirements of the armed forces. Nobody could oppose that. Why, there were two bishops present when Juicimeet laid the corner stone for its newest plant."

They had arrived before the big, rubber-flanged double doors of the vat room. "Please try not to cough or sneeze," Mr. Fremden cautioned them. "The culture infects very easily at this stage. We used to take groups of school children through, but we had to stop it when we lost two consecutive batches of Juicimeet. It's so difficult to make children be careful and clean."

The doors swung open as he pressed a series of buttons. The three editors followed Mr. Fremden in, aping his cautious step. The doors closed promptly behind them again.

The vat room was enormous, the size of a hangar, and all its floor space, except for the four-foot wide walk around the walls, was occupied by the waist-high, glass-lined vat. The air was faintly steamy, and a curious smell, a little like blood, a little like ammonia, came to the nose.

"The metal catwalks you see high above

the surface of the vat," Fremden said in the tone of a lecturer, "are used to harvest the protein crop. If you'll look up—" their glances followed his gesture—"you'll see the machinery by which they are lowered into place. I'm sorry there's not more to see now. Please remember what I told you, and keep back."

OBEDIENTLY, they flattened themselves against the walls. There was an instant's silence. Then, from the faintly greenish surface of the vat came a hollow, dull rumbling.

"What was that?" Miss Paura asked. She sounded—or was pretending to sound, Fremden thought savagely—startled. "What was that?"

He felt sweat again begin to trickle down inside his collar. "The culture is being aerated from below, dear lady," he said.

"Oh." Was Miss Paura, behind her gauze mask, smiling? "The vat made the same sort of rumble yesterday, at Veristeam," she told him. "But they said it was the nutrient activators being injected."

Fremden, gazing at her bright, calm eyes, felt a pang of pure hate. "Our formulae are very different, dear lady," he answered. He was trying hard to keep the ice out of his voice. "Juicimeet is a highly superior product. Our nutrient activators were injected long ago."

Could he decently usher them out yet? Had the VIPs seen enough? It was the food editor from *Homemaker*, Mrs. Timens, who asked the next question, oddly enough. "Tell me," she said, leaning her comfortable frame toward him, "—perhaps it's a silly question, but I don't understand technical things—tell me, does it ever feel anything?"

"Does it—" Mr. Fremden repeated momentarily at sea.

"The stuff. What you're growing in the vat."

"Oh." Under his mask, he licked his lips. It was a waste of time, but after he answered her he might be able to get them out. "I see what you mean. No, it feels nothing. It cannot."

"I want to explain that statement. Before an animal can feel anything—before it can perceive—several elements have to be present."

Had there been another rumble from the

vat? They were listening to him attentively; if there had been a rumble, they hadn't noticed it. None the less, Mr. Fremden had to clear his throat before he could go on.

"Several elements have to be present," he repeated. "There has to be a receptor—a sense organ, like the eye or the ear or the skin surface, where sense impressions are received. There have to be neurones, or nerve cells, to transmit the sense message. And there has to be an adjustor, like the brain, where the messages are sorted, processed, and referred out again to the effectors, like muscles and glands, to be acted upon."

They were fascinated now; he could see it in their faces. If there came a rumble now, they would ignore it. He drew a deep breath.

"None of these elements—receptors, neurones, or adjustors—is present in Juicimeet. Juicimeet is grown from 'seed,' or clumps of cells from the muscle tissue of animals—" here Mr. Fremden had to control an urge to lower his voice—"which were specially bred and selected for juiciness, tenderness, and palatability. There are no nerve fibers in Juicimeet! That is one of the reasons for its deliciousness.

"These clumps of cells are spaced evenly—or, as we call it, seeded—throughout the culture medium. The solution is very carefully controlled; it changes from hour to hour as various enzymes, activators, charges of oxygen and so forth are added. The result is that in some six days the isolated clumps of cells grow to a solid, delicious mass, weighing many tons, of Juicimeet. And incidentally, when you leave each of you will be given a neat cellophane-wrapped package of Juicibeef so that you can experience for yourselves, if you haven't already done so, how delicious it is. We recommended it for broiling, grilling, roasting, or as kebabs.

"Juicimeet is subject to a continuous process of selection. In each batch, some cells respond better to the nutrient solution than do others. It is from these superior cells that the new batch is grown. Juicimeet—" under the gauze mask he beamed at them—"becomes better all the time."

"And it can't feel anything—" Miss Paura murmured.

"Because it has neither neurones, receptors, nor adjustors. Exactly. It is animal

muscle tissue, nothing more.

"It is just this absence of sensation that has recommended Juicimeet so highly to humanitarians. Bernard Shaw used to say, you know, that he wanted to be followed to his grave by a procession of all the animals he *hadn't* eaten while he was alive. Nowadays a humane man can eat a delicious, tender, yummy Juicibeef steak every day of his life, and be sure that no single living creature has suffered because of his appetite.

"When one adds to the natural superiority of our product this humane element—well, we at Juicimeet feel safe in saying that by 1970 the only beef cattle alive will be those in zoos. They'll keep a few specimens there so the children can see what a steer used to look like."

THE OTHERS laughed. Miss Paura said, "We won't need them any more, so they'll go out of existence. Yes." She had drifted nearer to the vat and was looking down into it, her hands almost touching its rough concrete sides.

Mr. Fremden felt a surge of uncontrollable exasperation. "Dear lady, please move back against the wall," he said in a tone that wasn't at all pleading. "As you know, the culture is at a delicate stage. The enemy would like nothing better than to wreck this plant, and all the others like it. Next year we expect to be supplying an even higher proportion of the protein requirements of the armed forces than we are at present. We have top priority from Defense for all our present and future equipment needs. Personally, I'm convinced that the opposition the synthimeat industry met at first came from people who were either consciously subversive or who had been tricked into membership in crypto-subversive groups."

Still Miss Paura didn't move. Fremden chewed his lower lip savagely. He inhaled. "Have you ever noticed," he said to Mrs. Timens and Mr. Angst in a relaxed, conversational tone, "how subversives always have funny names? I've often remarked to my wife on it. Never names like Timens, or Angst. They just don't have good American names."

He looked toward Miss Paura. Her eyelids flickered. It seemed to him that the olive skin of her forehead was charged with

dull red. She turned away from the tank and walked toward them, her eyes a little lowered. "I thought I saw something moving," she said in a colorless voice.

"Ladies are apt to get fancies," Fremden said indulgently. He could afford to be indulgent with her; he had won. "There's nothing in the vat except seed culture of wholesome, delicious Juiciveal. With a little ginger and garlic, it makes a wonderful roast."

He shepherded them toward the door. He'd won, yes, but he was growing increasingly nervous. He knew the signs, and it wouldn't be long now. He *must* get them out in time.

From the vat there came a prolonged hollow rumbling, like thunder. Savagely he willed them not to look around. He pushed buttons. The doors moved open. They were nearly out, nearly safe.

There was a noise like the rushing of many waters. Their heads, except Miss Paura's, bobbed. Hurry, hurry. And then, what Fremden couldn't have foreseen, from within the enormous, high-ceilinged vat room, a cavernous, inarticulate voice.

They all turned round. Even Mr. Fremden couldn't keep himself from turning. He turned too, with rage and despair and horror in his heart.

The man in the vat was so tall that the glass edge reached only to his navel. His skin was patched with red and brown and yellow and black. His eyes seemed sightless; the flesh on his wrists kept dripping away and then reforming itself. The slit in his face opened and he mouthed at them. He had a tongue.

"Wa—wa—wa—" The syllables steadied into a word. "Why—why—" And then, with a great effort, a sentence, as the man in the vat turned its face from side to

side and peered at them. "Why—was I born? Why—why are you taking my flesh?"

It stood for a moment longer, turning its face as blindly as a caterpillar. Then its legs collapsed and it slumped down, slowly at first and then more rapidly, into the solution in the vat. It gave a kind of gurgle as the water closed over its head. Its head deliquesced. There was nothing in the vat now except potential Juicimeet.

THERE WAS a feel in the vat as if an earthquake had happened. The four looked at each other with impassive faces, in the silence of shock. It was too much; nobody showed any effect. At last Mr. Fremden sighed, and it was as if he were picking himself up from the floor.

To explain, to explain. To tell them that it only appeared at certain phases of the culture process, that it didn't mean anything. It didn't mean anything! It went away again. It always had.

He couldn't explain. It was useless. It was best to keep silent.

The event had been more shattering than he realized. The three editors were rigid, frozen. Horrified, Mr. Fremden felt his mouth opening. What words would come out? He coughed in a desperate attempt to keep them back.

In vain, in vain. Speech was urged on him from centers below the level of expediency and self interest. Primeval horror pushed the words—the words that would alienate the endorsement forever, give the lead to natural protein or to the very much inferior product of Veristeak—primeval horror forced his words out.

"We hoped it wasn't really alive," he told the three editors, trembling. "This is the first time it ever spoke to us."



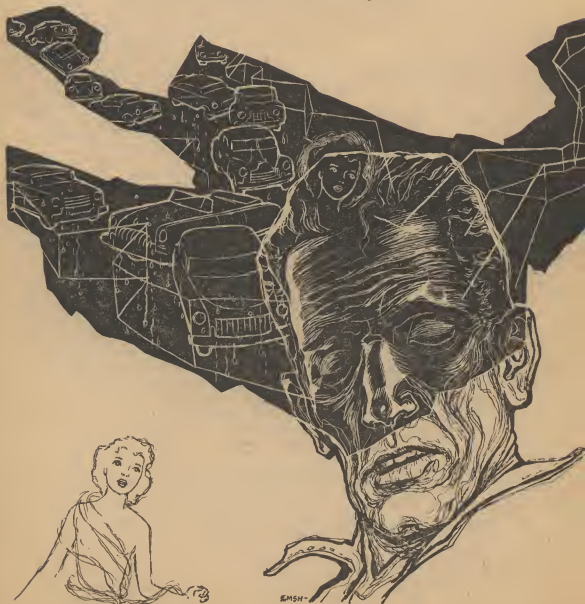
Look forward to **THE AVATAR**, another surprising story by

Margaret St. Clair coming in the next issue!

Jungle Doctor

a novelet by

ROBERT F. YOUNG



EMSH-



*Sarith had headed for Chalce
on a psychiatric mission—
but got lost on a savage,
backward planet named Earth!*

I

SNOW! At first, Sarith couldn't believe her eyes. Snow on Chalce? Snow in the reception room of the Chalce Clinic?

Shivering, she looked around her. Night. A strange sky. An even stranger valley. She guessed, then, what had happened. In her excitement over her first appointment and in her impatience to get started in her chosen field, she had misjudged her transit co-ordinates and had inadvertently transmitted herself to one of Chalce's primitive neighbors.

But which one? Obviously it had to be a member of a system near the edge of the galactic lens, for the Chalce binary was remote from the main federated planets. But the transit-unit strapped around her waist demanded more accurate information than that. If she wanted to transmit herself to Chalce she had to visualize not only the correct Chalce co-ordinates, but the distance between her present position and her desired destination. To do that she had to know exactly where she was. Her transit-unit had no memory: it merely accepted data, reacted

to it, and awaited further data.

Sarith shivered again. The wind-driven snow clung icily to her face, sifted down the back of her thin afternoon suit and melted coldly on her spine. She remembered the heavier clothing she had brought along for holiday treks in the Sharsh mountains, and she looked around for her traveling kit. All she saw was snow.

Even her belongings had gone astray!

Panic touched her, but she brushed it aside and forced her thoughts into an orderly pattern. The only type of planet to which a transit-unit could react was an inhabitable type, and inhabitable planets invariably supported intelligent life forms. Intelligent life forms always had a civilization of some kind, and even the crudest of civilizations included some manner of astronomical science. Her problem, then, was to contact the local natives and probe them for whatever information they possessed concerning the location of their world.

The trouble was, there were no natives in the vicinity. Then, when the wind abated momentarily, she glimpsed a scattering of wan lights far down the valley and in sudden hope she started towards them. That was when she realized how serious her situation was. The gravity was compatible enough, but the snow was knee-deep in some places and waist-deep in others. The cold numbed her nose, her hands, her feet; penetrated her afternoon suit as though it did not exist.

She had little strength remaining when she finally reached the road, and even that little was lost. For Sarith had never heard of ditches. One moment she was wading knee-deep in snow, and the next she was floundering up to her neck in snow. She managed to scramble up the slope of the ditch to the shoulder, but the effort completed her exhaustion. She was so tired, so very tired—I'll sleep for a while, she thought. Sleep—for a while—

LINDSEY washed cars days and drank nights. He walked home talking to trees, sometimes mumbling the *Sonnets From The Portuguese*, sometimes quoting passages from *Paradise Lost*. When there had been a lot of blood on the cars and he was real drunk, he concentrated on Ham-

let's soliloquy. Tonight he was having a hard time of it. It wasn't the wind so much, it was the blinding snow. He kept blundering off the road and into the ditch, and once he fell ignominiously, sprawling face down right in the middle of his favorite line, "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all; and thus the native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er—"

Lindsey lay there for some time, the blood-flecked cars whirling wildly in his mind. After a while he got to his hands and knees, and thence to his feet. He stood there in the wind, swaying, a gaunt white ghost of a man. "—with the pale cast of thought," he finished deliberately. The wind tore the words apart and flung them over his shoulder.

The fall had sobered him a little, and he remembered his flashlight. He got it out and flicked it on. He moved forward into the wind, lapsing into the *Sonnets*. "Belovèd, my Belovèd, when I think that thou wast in the world a year ago—" He felt the tears begin in his eyes, and then he felt them intermingling with the melted snow on his cheeks. He tasted their salt on his lips.

His lurching body patterned the beam of the flashlight, making the light jump from road to ditch to field, and crazily back again. The swirling snow played pranks on his eyes, teasing them with fantastic shapes and shadows, turning a roadside drift into the body of a sleeping child—

Lindsey paused uncertainly. He stared down at the body, but it would not go away. He concentrated on the mass of yellow curls, on the bare white arm half covering the childish face. And then, suddenly, he was kneeling by the roadside, touching the soft hair, the thin wrist, and thinking of Silas Marner and his lost gold. . . .

Lindsey lived in a rundown cottage a mile outside of Elmsville. Two apple trees grew riotously in the front yard and there was a 1948 Ford coupe perpetually parked in the overgrown driveway. There was a path leading between the apple trees to the front door.

The path was buried deep in drifts now, and for a while Lindsey was afraid he wasn't going to make it. But he forced

his numb legs forward and after an eternity he reached the door. Inside the house he switched on the light and dropped the girl on the couch before the fireplace. Then he began to build a fire.

As soon as the wood caught, he returned to the girl. He undressed her with clumsy hands, marveling at the texture of her clothing, struck by the exotic design of her sandals. There was a silvery belt strapped around her waist beneath her gossamer underclothing. It consisted of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of tiny interwoven wires, and it was embellished by a continuous series of tiny glistening nodes. When he touched it his fingers tingled.

He tried to unfasten it, but could find no means of doing so, and finally he left it where it was and went into the bedroom for blankets. He wrapped the girl in them and began to chafe her wrists. Slowly, color came into her cheeks, and the flicker of her pulse became a steady throb.

Lindsey added more wood to the fire and returned to the couch. There was a conflicting quality about the girl's face that fascinated him. The cheeks were full, but the nose was fine and delicate, if slightly turned up; and although the chin was small, its firm lines suggested maturity.

In one way she looked like a little girl sleeping, and in another way she looked like a young woman about to wake up.

But it was her hair that fascinated him the most. In the light of the flashlight, it had looked like gold. But it wasn't gold at all—it was pure yellow, the deep, rich yellow of summer sweetcorn—

Presently Lindsey became aware of his own exhaustion, and realized with a start that he was cold sober. He went into the kitchen, found a bottle that was not quite empty, and emptied it. Returning to the living room, he switched off the overhead light and turned on the battered floor lamp by the couch. He noticed the girl's wet clothing lying in a pile on the floor, and he picked it up and spread it on the back of a chair to dry. Then he drew another chair close to the hearth and sat down.

He sat there quietly, listening to the crackling of the maple logs, feeling the soporific heat of the flames. I'll have to tell the police about her first thing in the morning, he thought. Her parents are

probably crazy, wondering where she is. What was she doing out in a storm like this anyway, dressed for summer instead of winter, or maybe dressed for bed? Maybe she was running away. Kids do crazy things sometimes. Kids and people—

He'd had no intention of falling asleep. He had wanted to be there, waiting, when the girl came-to, so that he could reassure her. But he was very tired, too tired even to think of the cars. Almost without his knowing it, his head dropped back and his eyes closed. . . .

Sarith's first reaction to the room was horror. A native hut, she thought—primitive, sordid, unkempt. Then, looking around her further, she saw the little cultural traces that years of neglect had not entirely obliterated: the ragged curtains, the moldering wallpaper, the tiers of dusty books wainscoting one of the walls.

Presently her eyes came to her clothes, and with a shock she realized her nakedness. Instantly she thought of her transiunit, and she had a sudden demoralizing vision of herself stranded forever on a primitive planet, hopeless light years from home. Almost immediately she became aware of the familiar tingle around her waist, and she sighed with relief.

Her eyes moved from her clothes to the fire, past the fire— Suddenly she saw the sleeping man.

II

A GAIN, her first reaction was horror. But it transmuted swiftly to curiosity when she reached out and touched the sleeping mind. In the long years of preparation for her profession, Sarith had traversed many strange mental corridors, but she had never been confronted by a corridor as twisted and as tortured as the corridor that stretched before her now.

Intrigued, she moved into it. The first memory she came to was a gentle picture of herself sleeping on the couch. She felt the aura of kindness pervading the picture, and with a start she thought: A child! He thinks I am a little child! And then, wonderingly: He saved my life. This poor wretched creature saved my life!

She went on. The corridor curved abruptly and she saw the endless rows of

alien vehicles stretching on and on into infinity. She approached them closely and saw the flecks of blood on them, and for a moment she doubted the validity of her own psi-vision. What manner of complex is this, she wondered. What manner of mechanized culture have I blundered into?

She bypassed the vehicle sequence and came to the girl. The girl was tall and dark-haired and very beautiful in an alien way, and she was standing, sitting, reclining in a thousand different poses. Her name was Elaine, and she was dead. Sarith knew she was dead even before she saw the gray memory of the bier.

She became aware then of the sleeping man's anguish, his pain. And suddenly she saw the love he bore for the girl. It was a love so deep and profound, and so permeated with dull, aching regret, that she had to turn away from it.

That was when she saw the vault.

Just as the corridor was a concrete analogy supplied by her own mind to give substance to a psi-structure that otherwise would have been intangible, so was the vault an analogy—the most apt analogy her trained faculties could supply—to give substance to an experience which the sleeping man had buried deeply in his subconscious.

Sarith tried to open it, but its analogous door was tightly secured and defied her mental strength. Finally she desisted. There were other items of far more importance than repressed experiences to be garnered from the native's mind. The locale of his planet, for one, and the locale of Chalce, for another.

Provided such information was available.

She left the emotional level symbolized by the corridor, and delved into the accumulated data beneath. First she assimilated the language; then she went on to learn that the planet's name was Earth and that it was the third of nine orbiting a Go star somewhere near the perimeter of the galactic lens. All of which was excellent information and on a much higher plane than she had anticipated—but still not good enough.

Presently she found a half-remembered star map, and her heart began to pound. But the details were dim and she could not make them out. On an inspiration she

traced the map to its source and was delighted to discover that the original was part of a book stored in the very room in which she lay.

SHE DEPARTED swiftly from the sleeping man's mind. The room was gray with dawn. She wriggled out of the blankets and dressed in the wan warmth of the diminished fire; then started round the couch to the tiers of books.

Her route took her close to the chair where the man slept, and remembering the twisted corridor, the rows of incarnadine vehicles, the myriad pictures of the girl, but most of all remembering the vault, she paused and gazed down into the sleeping face.

Then, for a moment, she forgot the books and the star map; the sordid room itself. For a moment she even forgot Chalce. For the face was like no face she had ever seen before. It was a face that had aged beyond its years, yet still retained traces of youth; a face of shadowed eyes and drawn mouth; of thin cheeks, and a forehead horizontally excoriated by the whiplash of self-torture.

It was the face of a sick and dying man.

As she stood there, cold with the new knowledge, the sleeper stirred, awakened—

They were the bluest eyes that Lindsey had ever seen, and they were set far apart in the fairest face that he had ever seen. At the moment their sole *raison d'être* seemed to be him.

He straightened in the chair, feeling the stiffness of his legs and back. He looked around the room, surprised at the dawn light. The events of the preceding night came back slowly.

He returned his eyes to the girl. "How do you feel?" he asked.

She didn't answer right away. He got the impression she was searching for the right words. Finally: "I feel all right," she said. "Thank you for saving my life."

He looked at her closely. Her words had been full and clear, her intonation perfect. Perhaps that was the trouble; you didn't expect flawless diction from a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old child.

"I'm glad you're okay," Lindsey said. "I was a little worried last night. What's your name?"

"Sarith."

"Mine's Gordon. Gordon Lindsey. Where do you live?"

There was a pause during which the blue eyes regarded him searchingly. Then: "I live a long ways from here, Mr. Lindsey."

"That's not much of an answer. What town do you live in? What state?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

"Because it would sound absurd to you. Besides, it doesn't matter. I'll be leaving soon."

"But I'd like to help you," Lindsey said. "Are you in some kind of trouble? Did you run away and get stranded in the storm?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that either."

"But why not? You're going to have to tell the police."

"The police?"

"Why of course. I've got to report finding you. Your parents are probably looking all over the countryside for you right now."

"My parents are not looking for me, Mr. Lindsey."

Lindsey stood up. "I've got to report you anyway," he said.

I should take her down to the police station, he thought. But she'd only freeze all over again in those thin clothes. I'll drop in the station on my way to work and tell them to stop by for her. I can't keep her here—

Suddenly he was conscious of the intensity of the girl's eyes. Their blueness seemed to incandesce, to stab into his mind; and yet he felt no pain other than the dull throbbing of the hangover that was always with him. And then, abruptly, her eyes resumed their normal hue, and he was at a loss to explain whether their metamorphosis had been real or imaginary. Considering the fact that it was early in the morning and he hadn't had his first drink yet, the latter contingency seemed the more probable.

He built up the fire; then went into the kitchen and fried the girl some eggs, and made a pot of coffee. Sarith approached the eggs diffidently, employing a spoon instead of a fork. Sipping his coffee across the table from her, Lindsey could have sworn she had never seen an egg before.

But apparently she liked them, for she cleaned her plate thoroughly.

"If you get hungry later on, you can fix yourself something to eat." He showed her where the canned goods were. Then he donned his denim jacket and went to the door. No sense telling her the police are coming, he decided. She'd only be upset, and she might run away again. "I'm going to work now. You be a good little girl till I get back."

He took a good look at her before he went out. He wanted to remember her face, her eyes, her childish mouth; and above all he wanted to remember the sweet-corn shade of her hair—the gold he had found in the snow and couldn't keep, because he was living in the twentieth century, and because he was a drunk.

A GOOD little girl! Sarith was furious. Here she was, a graduate psi-therapist, a resident psi-therapist in the greatest mental clinic in the galactic federation, and in the eyes of this technological savage she was nothing but a little girl!

And yet his thoughts were so kind, she thought. Beautiful almost. Gold in the snow— No one ever thought that way about my hair before. But if I'm going to get to Chalce I'll never do so standing here. By the time he gets back I can be light years away, interviewing my first patient, possibly—

My first patient.

No, not really my first. This poor savage is my first, in a way. But of course, he doesn't count. I've no time to bother with him and his wretched vault. There must be medicine men in his society. They should be capable of dealing with his sickness.

But why don't they come to him? Why do they let him suffer?

She stamped her foot angrily. Well, I don't care, she thought. I'm not going to concern myself about it. Why, this isn't even a federated planet. And why should I worry about him anyway? He's going to report me to his wretched native-police force and have me taken off his hands.

Or at least he thinks he is.

She smiled at the thought of the block she had imposed. In better humor she went over to the wainscoting of books and

began searching for the one she had seen in Lindsey's mind. . . .

The storm had blown itself out during the night and the February morning was crisp and blue-skied. Lindsey walked in the middle of the road, giving the cars a hard time as he always did, never moving out of the way till the last second, and then giving them just enough room to go by. There weren't many cars that morning though; the snowplow hadn't come through yet and the drifts were discouragingly deep.

The road was officially designated Route 16, and before the Throughway had bypassed the town it had been a heavily traveled highway. Now it was just another road, servicing local traffic. It came into Elmsville on the north, became Locust Street for a while, then turned right and became Main Street, going down a hill and across a viaduct, finally turning left, leaving the town and becoming Route 16 again.

III

THE GARAGE where Lindsey worked was at the bottom of the hill, on the other side of the viaduct. There was a drug store on the corner where he had to turn to go down the hill, and right next door to the drug store was the police station.

He had every intention of stopping in and telling the night clerk about the girl. He even had the words framed in his mind and ready to deliver. He was surprised, then, when he walked right by the frosted door and on down the hill.

He made an effort to turn around and go back. He went right on walking. He frowned. He knew that in his heart he didn't want to report the girl, that he liked to think of her there in his house, waiting for him to come home. But just the same, he had to report her. For her parents' sake, if not her own. And if her parents were dead, or had deserted her, there still had to be someone, somewhere, who was concerned about her.

Not necessarily, though. There were plenty of kids around that no one wanted. There were cases in the paper every day—Oh, the hell with it! he thought suddenly.

I'll report her this noon.

Across the viaduct there was a metal sign over the walk that said, NICK'S GARAGE—CARS GREASED, WASHED & REPAIRED. Across the street from Nick's, there was a neon sign—anemic now in the morning sunlight—that said, SAM'S STOP-OVER—RESTAURANT & GRILLE.

Lindsey crossed the viaduct diagonally, contemptuous of the passing cars, and helped Sam open up. Then he waited impatiently at the bar till the backbar clock registered the legal hour of 8:00 A. M., and after ordering and downing his usual eyepener, a double shot with beer chaser, he recrossed the street and went to work.

There was only one car to wash that morning—one that had been left the night before. After Lindsey washed it, doing his usual meticulous job and making sure all the blood was off, Nick put him to work sweeping. When Lindsey finished sweeping, Nick put him to work wiping down the grease-job equipment. Once Nick had let Lindsey wait on the front, but never again. Lindsey wouldn't get out of the way of the cars and several times he'd come close to being run down. Nick wasn't partial to drunks, especially educated drunks, and he wouldn't have cared particularly if Lindsey had got run down; but you had to think of the insurance rates, and besides car wash men were hard to get.

At noon Lindsey crossed the street to the Stop-Over again and consumed what was known locally as the Lindsey Lunch—three double shots, three beers, and a ham on rye. He didn't go near the police station. The car wash business picked up that afternoon. It was Friday, and the February sun hinted that a pleasant weekend might be coming up. Lindsey washed five cars. There was a lot of blood on the last one and he knew he needed a drink pretty bad, but he made sure he washed it all off. It was quitting time by then, and he returned to the Stop-Over.

After three double shots, things steadied a little. But some of the blood had come off on his hands and it took four more double shots to make it go away. Lindsey felt pretty good by then. He sat quietly at the end of the bar, watching the customers come and go, nodding to the hand-

ful he knew, seeing the shadows lengthen on the street.

Pretty soon Elaine came in and sat beside him. She'd been to the library again and there was a little piece of paper marking her place in the book she had borrowed.

Hi, baby, he said.

* Hello, Gordon.

There was a presumptuous autumn leaf clinging to her suede jacket, and he reached over and brushed it off. He touched the book tucked under her arm.

What are we reading now? he asked.

Just something I happened to pick up.

He slipped the book from under her arm and opened it. *Sonnets From The Portuguese*, he read. Aren't you the literary young thing, though!

Not really, she said. I just thought I'd like to read them.

He turned the pages to the bookmark. One of the sonnets was underlined, and he began to read it aloud: *And wilt thou have me fashion into speech—it was noisy in the college cafeteria and he had to raise his voice—the love I bear thee, finding words enough—*

She took over.

And hold the torch out, while the winds are rough, between our faces, to cast light on each? I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach my hand to hold my spirit so far off from myself—that I should bring thee proof in words, of love hid in me out of reach—

Say, you already know it, he said.

I memorized it today.

Suddenly he saw the way her eyes were. There was a new quality in them—a mistiness that softened them and made them different from any woman's eyes he had ever seen before. And then he felt cheap and shoddy, undeserving of the idealism with which she had clothed him. And yet at the same time he felt relieved; thankful that he would no longer need to conceal his love for her with affected indifference and flippant remarks.

He rifled the pages of the book, stopped them finally. He began to read—

Belovèd, my Belovèd, when I think that thou wast in the world a year ago, what—

The hours passed.

“—time I sat alone here in the snow and saw no footprint, heard the silence sink no moment at thy voice, but—”

“Okay, Lindsey, that's all for you.”

ELAINE blurred, faded away. The college cafeteria disintegrated and a lovely autumn afternoon became a bleak February night. Slowly the Stop-Over came into focus, the Stop-Over, and Sam standing on the other side of the bar with the familiar shut-off look in his eyes.

Lindsey shrugged. He drank the rest of his shot and stood up. “To hell with you, Sam,” he said, and walked out.

There were other bars.

He stopped in three of them before he started for home. He was in the “soliloquy” stage by then, and the road was far too narrow for his erratic progress. Once a new Buick nearly ran him down. Lindsey stood weaving in the darkness after it had passed, cursing the dwindling tail-lights, cursing the impulse that had made him leap aside at the last moment.

He had forgotten all about the girl, and he was astonished to see a light in his window and smoke wreathing up from his chimney into the crisp night. He was even more astonished when he entered the house and saw his books scattered all over the floor, with the girl in the midst of them, one of them open on her lap . . .

Finding the book that contained the star map had been simple, and the star map, while crude, had been accurate enough to enable her to orient herself. On it, the Chaldean binary bore the fanciful appellation of Alpha Centauri.

To establish her position and to determine the distance to Chalce, all she had to do was substitute the corresponding sector of her eidetic star map. That required but a moment, and she could have transmitted herself then and there.

But she didn't.

For one thing, there was the vault in her host's mind. No matter how many times she told herself that Lindsey wasn't really her first patient, the relentless fact recurred that, patient or not, his was the most baffling mind she had ever entered, and therefore a challenge to her newly acquired abilities as a psi-therapist.

And then, for another thing, there were the books. They were surprisingly varied, and some of them were on an intellectual plane considerably higher than she had

thought possible in so barbaric a culture. She had read them, every one, pausing only to eat and to rebuild the fire, and finally she had come to the one that interested her the most.

Interested, and infuriated her. A book by Albert Schweitzer.

Self-centered savage! she thought. Bargaining his life for nobility. Running off to a little jungle clearing and playing god to a handful of unwashed aborigines. And believing, actually believing in his heart, that his motivation is spiritual!

Her mood had calmed by the time Lindsey arrived, but dregs of her anger still remained. She rechanneled them in his direction. Just look at the chaotic creature! she thought. Permeated, utterly permeated with the distilled grain he imbibes to wash away reality!

She laid the book aside and stood up. "I thought you were going to report me to the police," she said coldly.

"The police," Lindsey said, swaying. He shook his head vaguely. "I didn't," he said. "Somehow I didn't. I don't know why." He looked bewilderedly at the scattered books. "My books—" he began.

She saw the thought in his mind and intercepted his words. "I was only reading them," she said. Did children mutilate books in this horrid society?

"But you're so young," Lindsey said. "So young to be reading Shakespeare, Hegel—Schweitzer."

He stepped forward and nearly fell. Sarith saw how bad he was then, and she helped him out of his jacket and over to the chair by the fire. She peeked into the corridor and saw all the cars, and suddenly contrition overcame her.

"Sit down and rest," she said softly. "Are you hungry?"

But Lindsey's head had already fallen back and his eyes had closed. For a shocked moment, Sarith thought he was dead, but then she saw the movement of his chest and heard the hoarse sound of his breathing.

FOR SOME time she stood immobile beside the chair, then she went over and sat down on the couch.

I could leave this instant, she thought. With a flick of my mind I could escape

from this slovenly hovel, this forsaken psychopath, this jungle clearing. In an instant I could be in the Chalce Clinic and see the lucid walls rising around me, and through the walls the eternal summer landscape stretching away to the pink Sharsh mountains—

The native twisted in his chair, moaned softly in his sleep.

Sarith sighed. . . .

At first the over-all pattern of the corridor seemed the same. Just past the entrance there was a blue-eyed image of herself, but sitting in the middle of the living room floor this time instead of sleeping on the couch; and then the sudden curve and all the cars.

Abruptly Sarith saw the man moving among the cars. Washing them. Furiously, desperately, meticulously washing them.

The man was Lindsey.

There were so many cars, and all of them had flecks of blood on them. The new cars were the worst because so many of them were red and you could never really tell if all the blood was off, and you had to get it off, some way, somehow, because it had no right to be there, it was wrong for it to be there, horribly, shamefully, unforgivably wrong—

Shuddering, Sarith ran past the car sequence and came to the mental images of the girl named Elaine. She did not view them haphazardly this time, but tried to arrange them in their proper chronological order.

As nearly as she could ascertain, the first image was the one where Elaine was sitting in what appeared to be a primitive classroom. There were vague faces all around her, but hers was the only one that stood out: flashing black eyes beneath dark winged brows, rather high cheek bones, cheeks filled with the pinkness of youth, a wide mouth parted in a warm smile. A beautiful face. Sarith had to admit, though by her own standards it seemed old.

The next image had to be the one where Lindsey and Elaine were walking together across a close-cropped sward beneath tall stately trees. In the background were vine-garnished buildings reminiscent of a different, far more dignified age.

And the one after that was probably the one where Elaine was entering what

seemed to be a public eating place of some kind, carrying a thin book under her arm. It was a particularly vivid image, for Sarith could see a tiny piece of paper marking one of the pages of the book, and she could even see a small colored leaf on the girl's shoulder—

There were so many images that she could not study each of them individually but had to skim through them, dwelling longest over the ones she considered to be the most essential:

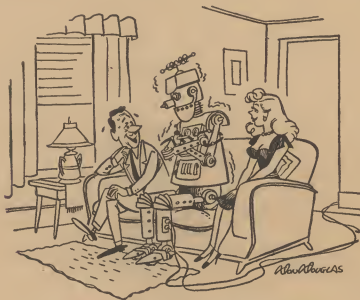
Elaine's face, painstakingly remembered,

Elaine and Lindsey meandering through meadows green with summer—

Elaine and Lindsey in a familiar room, packing clothing into leather containers— (This room, Sarith thought. This very room!)

Elaine lying in her bier among wreaths and blankets of flowers, her cheeks no longer pink, but white and cold; her eyes closed forever—

Puzzled, Sarith went through the images again. At first she thought she had missed one, the most essential one of all. But her



*"I hear your father's quite the dabbler
in electronics..."*

the lashes of the closed eyes a delicate fringe lightly touching the soft cheeks, the upturned mouth a pale crimson flower about to bloom—

Elaine's hand, and a golden band being slipped on one of the fingers—

Elaine's profile silhouetted against the background of a tremendous cataract—

Elaine standing in the doorway of a small building, waving— (The building was newly painted, asparkle with white siding and green shutters; nevertheless, Sarith recognized it as the native hut in which she sat.)

second survey netted her nothing: there was no image that threw any light whatsoever on the circumstances of Elaine's death.

IV

SUDDENLY she remembered the vault. Why of course!

She approached it confidently, but her knowledge of the nature of its contents was not enough; she still couldn't open it. For a moment she was furious, and she pounded on the symbolized door with angry

psi-fists. Then she calmed herself. She was behaving like a child instead of a graduate psi-therapist.

She remembered her training. There were more ways than one to uncover a repressed experience. When ordinary psi-techniques failed, there was always word association, and the association words, in this instance, were right at her fingertips: Elaine, car, blood, death.

But in order to apply them, she would have to wait till Lindsey awoke. She withdrew from his mind. His breathing was deep, labored. It would be morning, at least, before awareness returned to that drink-saturated mind.

There was nothing for it but to spend another night in the cramped little room. But in the morning I'll be free, she thought—free to leave this psychopathic jungle and carry on my work among civilized patients with civilized complexes.

But civilized or not, Lindsey's complex intrigued her more than any of those with which she had come in contact during her long internship. Why does he see blood on the cars? she thought. Is it possible that there really is blood on them?

She knew what cars were, of course, by then. She had seen many of them passing on the road during the day and she had identified them with the images in Lindsey's mind. But she had never seen a real one at close range, so she couldn't be absolutely sure whether Lindsey's preoccupation was normal or psychopathic.

Then she remembered the car that stood in the yard outside. Suddenly curious, she got up from the couch and slipped out of the house. In the east a gibbous moon was rising, and the snow-covered yard was silvered. The car was an ugly blob in the silvered snow, on a line with the corner of the house. Sarith approached it closely. It was quite old, she saw, and it had not been moved for a long time. The weather had been unkind to it: its tires were rotted, and its sides were streaked with rust. One of its doors was open and hanging by one hinge. The interior smelled of mold and decay.

She walked around the car in the moonlight. There was no blood on it as far as she could see.

At least not now . . .

Sarith slept badly. She twisted and turned on the couch, thinking over and over of the car in the yard. And all through the night she was vaguely conscious of a growing uneasiness, an uneasiness that had nothing to do with the abandoned car and its potential implications but which was related in some way to her physical *status quo*. It wasn't until dawn was a gray ghost in the room that she realized what was wrong.

In her excitement over her first appointment and in her eagerness to get started in her chosen field, she had not only misjudged her co-ordinates, but she had also forgotten to replenish the energy cells of her transit-unit. The tingle around her waist had faded to a faint titillation.

Her first impulse was to transit to Chalce immediately. As long as the unit contained any life at all it would function for so relatively brief a distance. But then her eyes touched the man sleeping in the chair, and she remembered the vault, and she realized that if she did not discover its contents before she left she would be haunted for the rest of her life. And it was out of the question for her to transit to Chalce, replenish her unit, and then return, for once on Chalce her residency would automatically go into effect. While a residency was not restrictive in a planetary sense, it was definitely restrictive in a galactic sense. A resident psi-therapist was on constant call, and except for her biennial sabbatical, was never permitted to transit beyond the Chalcian horizons.

There was still time to learn the nature of the buried experience, but not time enough for word association subtleties. She had to make a direct approach and risk aggravating Lindsey's complex still further. There was no other way.

She got up, dressed, and went over to the chair. She was about to shake Lindsey into wakefulness when she saw the fluttering of his eyelids, detected the slight change in his breathing.

THE EYES seemed even bluer than before, and more absorbed in him than ever. Lindsey straightened up in the chair, felt the renewed throb of the endless hangover. He was totally unprepared when the girl said, "Why did you murder your wife,

Mr. Lindsey?"

At first his mind fought back the words, refused to assimilate them. But gradually they got through his defenses and stabbed into his consciousness. The room reeled around him, and he raised a trembling hand to his throbbing head. In spite of everything he could do, the present tore ahead and the past came walking arrogantly through the rent. Seven years absconded and the ghastly day returned—

It was the Tuesday following the Labor Day weekend, the Tuesday marking the end of sweet summer—that dreaming honeymoon in the cottage he and Elaine had bought on the outskirts of the little town so that they would always have some faraway place to come to whenever their new posts at the university permitted.

Bitter Tuesday.

Bitter with the aftermath of their first quarrel. . . .

Lindsey threw the suitcases into the trunk of the new Ford, slammed the trunk cover shut, and went around and got into the driver's side. He started up the car and let the motor idle, then he sat there hating Elaine.

Elaine was still in the cottage, smearing silly lipstick on her lips, touching up her cheeks with unnecessary rouge.

Lindsey waited for her to come out, lock the back door, and get into the car. He thought up cruel, cutting things to say to her, sitting there in the car, the motor idling.

His resentment smoldered in him as the minutes whispered past. She was deliberately making him wait, deliberately trying to show him that she didn't care if they *never* made up.

Well, he didn't care either!

He gripped the steering wheel angrily, raced the motor loudly so that she would hear it and know that he didn't care.

Abruptly the front door slammed, and the thought that she had decided to go out the front way when she knew perfectly well that he was waiting at the back was a catalyst to his anger. He shifted into reverse and brought his foot down hard on the accelerator—harder than he had intended. The car shot back wildly. His desperate foot found the brake and bore down hard, but the scream had already

shattered the September day by then, and the sickening lurch of the car as the back wheels passed over the soft, beloved body was already an excruciating memory.

And then he was out of the car and running around to where Elaine lay crumpled on the gravel, and seeing the startled disbelief on her gray and dying face and the accusation in her dilated eyes, and then seeing the drops of red on the gleaming fender and the crimson smear on the white sidewalls of the tire. . . .

Lindsey was back in the present. He got up from the chair and found his way out of the room and into the morning. The wind was from the south, and the snow was melting, and the car was sitting in the drive the way he had left it seven years ago. There was no corpse beneath it now, and the blood had long since washed away. And yet it was still there—

He got to the road somehow, and he walked down the middle of the road, praying that a car would come. Come swiftly. Mercifully—

So now you know, Sarith thought. Now you can go to Chalde.

You can go to Chalde and take up your residency. You can forget all about this miserable savage who imagines he killed his mate because her eyes accused him when she died.

Who washes imaginary blood off cars as part of a self-inflicted penance and who drinks himself into insensibility because the penance is too much for him to bear.

Who wanders the dim trails of his jungle civilization hoping that a careless driver will perform the task which he cannot find the courage to perform for himself.

Who is a victim of his own sensitivity—a poor wanderer in this jungle civilization wherein the physician does not come to the maimed but expects the maimed to come to him.

Except for one physician; only one. And perhaps he *is* noble, after all, this jungle doctor in his primitive African province, writing his *Philosophy of Civilization* in his corrugated iron hut, playing his Bach in stolen moments, administering to the strangulated hernias of his flock—

Now you can go, Sarith. Now.

To the clean, chaste corridors of the Chalde clinic and the clean, uncomplicated

minds of the federated patients whom the peripatetic therapists have deemed in need of institutional care.

And you can begin the noble task of alleviating their picayune frustrations, of reanimating their sexual desires, of refurbishing their egos—

He picked me up, out of the snow, and carried me to the crude hovel he calls his home. He was concerned about me. I was a living creature, and despite the pain of his years and the horrid apathy of his days he was concerned with the life in me.

This sick savage. This jungle wanderer.

And what a vast jungle it must be! Far larger than Lambaréné. There must be many Lindseys wandering its dim trails, maimed of mind and spirit. Many many Lindseys. And no jungle doctor to ease their dumb pain—

Now you can go, Sarith. *Now!*

LINDSEY had never seen so much blood on a car. He scrubbed and scrubbed, but it wouldn't come off. Presently Nick came over to where Lindsey was kneeling at the back left fender of the Chrysler.

"What's the matter with you?" Nick said. "You should have finished that car a long time ago!"

Lindsey didn't say anything. Nick didn't understand about the blood. No one understood about the blood, about how it was always there, Elaine's blood, and you had to wash it away, you couldn't leave it there, it was wrong to leave it there, horribly, shamefully, unforgivably wrong. If someone would understand, perhaps there wouldn't be so much blood, perhaps there wouldn't be any blood at all—

There was so much blood this morning that it was too much for one person to wash away. He scrubbed furiously—

"Hey!" Nick shouted. "Are you crazy? You'll ruin the finish! You'll—"

Nick's voice floundered, trailed away. Lindsey saw the exotic sandals then, and the slender legs rising above them. When Sarith knelt beside him her face seemed older somehow, and there was a quality in her eyes that made him think of Christ.

She took the sponge from his bleeding hands.

"Let me help you," she said.



WHAT'S NEW UNDER THE SUN

THE Bell Telephone Laboratories announced the development of solar-powered telephone equipment, based upon a new battery that will tap the sun for energy. The solar battery is receiving its first practical test in Americas, Georgia, where an experimental unit is servicing rural telephone lines. Bell scientists say that the "heart" of their solar battery is a tiny silicon disk that converts sunlight into energy. The battery looks somewhat like a flat radar unit, or a tray tilting upward toward the sun.

High in the French Pyrenees, a startlingly new furnace is being operated by scientists. Felix Trombe, director of the National Center for Scientific Research in Paris helped invent the furnace, which is composed of giant composite mirrors capable of trapping the sun's energy. To achieve this feat, Mr. Trombe designed a giant composite mirror made of several hundred little mirrors. The sun furnace has already been in operation over two years, and it is capable of generating a temperature of 5,432 degrees Fahrenheit. French scientists are using it to produce and study various minerals which are made at temperatures too high for ordinary furnaces. In other words, the sun furnace is the hottest thing around!

Next time you're out sunbathing, just think of all the valuable energy you're absorbing!

—Herbert D. Kastle

A Fish Story
to End
All Fish Stories



Illustration
by EMSH

Compleated Angler

By MACK REYNOLDS

OLD MAN Fredericks brought his car down quietly, not more than fifty feet from where the bridge had once crossed the St. Johns River. It was a full hour before dawn and he assumed there would be no one about, but he peered to his right and left before allowing himself a soft chuckle.

The oldster began digging around in the equipment he had stuffed into the rear be-

fore sneaking from the house. He hoped he had everything. Some of it had been hidden away so well he'd like never to have found it.

He carried the boat down to the water's edge, pressed its assembly button, and watched anxiously to see if the aged mechanism would work. It worked all right, all right. Real nervous, he told himself in the

idiom of his youth.

He went back to the car for the kicker. The squares had called them outboards in the old days, he was reminded, but they were kickers to the real sportsmen. Dig this cool model, though. He'd had it made up a full year ago, unbeknownst to any of the family; probably the only water craft in existence.

The kicker attached to the boat's stern, he returned to the car for his tackle and the lunch spheres he'd made up the night before. He put these on the grass, and turned back to the car long enough to fiddle with its remote control studs. He'd leave it, he decided, at a full twenty thousand foot altitude. No use giving himself away by the nearby presence of his car. He slipped the control panel in his hip pocket and watched the car rise slowly. . . .

He let the kicker push the boat through the hyacinths and the lily pads that lined the river bank and then, in the barely moving current, headed upstream. He'd fish near Windy Bill's old island. For one thing, he could anchor right behind it and give himself that much more cover from prying eyes. Not that he expected anyone else to be on the river today. Not even the usual kids. They'd be gathered here and there at the various Bomb Day services.

Bomb Day, he snorted inwardly. He'd seen enough Bomb Day services to last a dozen life times—even life times as long as his.

The river was as he had remembered it, now that the first faint flush of dawn was revealing the cypress, knee deep at the water's edge, the live oak, prisoners in their manacles of Spanish moss, the palms, heads held proudly high. Could he hear a squirrel crashing its excited way through palm fronds? Not very likely, but it could be possible. It'd been a long time since he'd heard a squirrel barking.

HE HAD almost a mile before he reached Windy Bill's island, but he couldn't wait any longer. As the boat whispered easily along, he dug into his bait box and brought forth a shiner minnow. He examined it with pride. Not only did it look like a real shiner, but it felt, smelled and actually tasted like a shiner. As he attached it to his line, he wondered how long it had been since a real shiner had actually in-

habited this stretch.

His kicker was the ultimate in silence, but he decided to let his bait trail far astern and set his power reel for a quarter mile. He cast, prideful of the fact that his wrist still held the old skill, and watched the bait disappear into the darkish river mist behind. In the old days, trolling that far behind a boat would have been impractical, your line would have become snagged in grass or hyacinths. Eliminating the line had been a definite advantage.

Or had it? He remembered the various advances that had been made in angling since his youth. Outboard motors of ever increasing power to get you to the best beds more quickly; spin reels, to enable you to cast further; bait lures that became impossible for a fish to resist; then power reels, remote control plugs, and on and on.

The question was—if they had stuck to the old methods, forsaken the ultra-modern devices, would fishing still be today what it had once been? He decided not. It hadn't been just the super-efficient equipment. The whole trend of world development had presaged an end of first hunting, then, in its turn, fishing. Along with the fantastic growth in population and the need for converting the former wilds into population centers and to the cultivation of more practical foods than fish and meat, had been the slow change in man's outlook in regard to other life.

Old Man Fredericks snorted his disgust. Why, when he was a boy, only Hindus and vegetarians held the opinions the whole world subscribed to now. Bunch of confounded do-gooders! That was what they had called them in the old days—do-gooders. There was a sneering connotation to the term—he couldn't remember the original reason for it, but it was there.

Was that a slight tug on his bait, echoed back to him through the reel's sonar? No, must be his imagination. The miniature teevee screen built into the handle showed no sign of a predatory fish.

"Do-gooders," he snorted aloud. He'd like to see how all this regard for other life would stand up if a mosquito landed on one of them. Yes, sir. If we only still had mosquitos, or ticks, or even chiggers, we'd see how long they loved all life. But they'd eliminated them along with the house fly and the cockroach and every other pest,

long before humanity decided that it loved all living things.

He reached his destination behind the island, found the exact spot he wanted, and flipped the anchor toggle, rooting his boat in place so that a hurricane wouldn't have budged it.

Old Man Fredericks brought his bait in slowly, watching the teevee screen with care but without avail. He shrugged. With any real fisherman, it was the fishing that counted, not the quantity of fish caught. In the old days he'd spent many a day within feet of this very spot, without a single run. Not a hit. Not a sign of a bass.

He shifted in his pneumatic chair. Confound it, though, he would like to get one today. To make the day really complete, he'd certainly like to catch one.

IF HE caught one, he'd take it home, scale it, gut it and, no matter what Margaret said, he'd cook it up. Filets would be the thing. Nobody else'd want any anyway. He might as well filet it, dip it in egg—confound it, where would he be able to locate an egg?—then in cracker crumbs, and fry it in butter. He made a face. It'd have to be soybean butter.

He cast the shiner out again, over toward the east bank, brought it in slowly. He cast it out to the south, let it wander around a bit at random. You never knew with a bass. Maybe they'd be up against the bank, under the hyacinths; maybe in the channel.

He sank back into his seat and relaxed. For five years he'd been planning this excursion, and he was going to drain every minute of its pleasure.

It was fully light now, and he realized his chances of discovery had multiplied. Confound it, the hour just at dawn was the best of the day and he hadn't had a strike, not to speak of a run.

Old Man Fredericks thought back over the years and remembered tobacco and wished that he had a smoke now. A cigar. Even better, a pipe to be smoked slowly, easily, and with relaxed enjoyment. It was a sad day, he growled inwardly, when the World Congress had decided that the acreage devoted to tobacco cultivation could no longer be afforded. Let's see. Must have been a full seventy-five years ago. Was a bit of bootlegging for a time, but it must

have been at least sixty years since he'd tasted tobacco at all. He tried to remember the soothing satisfaction of the weed, and pretended that he could.

He cast again and let the shiner drift with the current, several hundred yards below the boat. Fish weren't biting today. Not that he cared, of course. It was the opportunity to *fish* that counted, not his catching anything. He had to keep reminding himself of that.

One thing was certain. He didn't know how long it would be before they located him, but when they did! One thing was pretty certain; he'd never have the chance to fish again.

The sun climbed as it had always climbed.

Old Man Fredericks shifted anxiously and peered down the river. No sign of them yet. No sign of anybody at all. He grunted in deprecation. Bomb Day services. A whole world was in mourning. Well, he'd fooled them this time. This time the last remaining veteran of Bomb Day just wasn't at the services.

He chuckled aloud. The last veteran of Bomb Day was off fishing instead of having his hand shook by speech-making officials as teevee cameras ground away at him. Yes, sir, he was off fishing.

The bass hit like an explosion.

His thoughts had been off the bait, and on speeches, toasts, and marching. It took him a full half minute to realize that his shiner had been struck, taken, and was now being hauled unceremoniously down stream.

He grunted an old man's excitement and peered anxiously into the teevee mirror. Black as black. Crazy man, real crazy! The bass already had the fish inside him.

Let him run. Let him run at least a hundred yards before setting the hook!

Old Man Fredericks got to his feet holding his rod in shaking hands. Easy now, easy now! Don't get excited! Confound it, let him run!

THE BASS began to slow and the sonar indicator slacked off. Old Man Fredericks took a deep breath, and socked him, and socked him again. Sink that hook!

There!

The bass broke. It threw itself into the air a hundred yards or more from the old man's boat, threshed its tail wildly, sank

back again.

Old Man Fredericks set the tension at eight pounds, needing all his will power to refrain from using a full twenty test and horsing the bass in safely.

The fish ran then, and the hum of the reel was music. Slowly the old man applied pressure, began to take in slack. The bass ran again. Ran and broke. Ran and broke. It was a fish! You had to admit that. It was a fighting fish!

Fifty feet from the boat, the bass made its last bid. It lunged its full length into the air.

"Dig that crazy bass," the old man gloated. "Must go fifteen pounds."

He brought him in slowly, the fight rapidly going out of the beaten fish. When it was finally at the edge of the boat, Old Man Fredericks bent quickly, inserted his finger and thumb between gills and mouth, and hauled him in.

It wouldn't go fifteen pounds, but it was a good twelve, he decided. Good even for the St. Johns of the old days before the war.

The oldster realized now that he was tired; more so than his doctor allowed. He decided that it was unlikely he'd have any further luck anyway, flicked the anchor toggle, started up the kicker and headed down stream for the point at which he'd embarked. . . .

They were waiting for him there. Two of the park's attendants. Nice, upright boys who helped preserve this lone spot of Earth as it once had been. A full square mile of natural forest, of natural river, preserved so that youth everywhere would make pilgrimages to the world of yesteryear.

The taller attendant helped him beach the boat. "Hello, Mr. Fredericks," he said, without inflexion.

Old Man Fredericks decided against a sheepish facial expression, and said definitely, "I don't care what you say."

The shorter attendant helped him from the boat, and the old man was surprised to feel how stiff a few hours on the river had made him. He carried the bass out with him.

"Nice fish," the taller one said, non-committally.

"You're darn right it's a nice fish," Old Man Fredericks said. "First time I been fishing in fifty years, but an old timer like

me knows how to get them."

"Ummm," the shorter one said.

"Going to take him home and fry him," Old Man Fredericks snapped.

The taller one nodded. "That'll be the first time that's been done in a quarter century—ever since it was decided that the ocean be devoted to farming and that the fish had to go."

Old Man Fredericks said, "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing, Mr. Fredericks," the shorter one said. "Listen, Mr. Fredericks, I hate to bother you, but my boy—he probably missed seeing you on teevee at the Bomb Day services. Would you mind?" He held out a stylus and pad.

"Autograph, eh?" Old Man Fredericks grunted sourly. "Afraid I won't last until next Bomb Day?" He took the stylus and scratched his name hurriedly.

HE TOOK the control panel from his pocket and threw the switch to activate the return of his car; then began to gather his equipment. The park attendants helped him reassemble the collapsible boat in silence.

The car swooped down and he loaded it. "I'll still be here next year, all right," he said in the way of a parting shot, "and you boys better look alive, or maybe I'll be ducking all those confounded services again and coming back to fish."

His car took off and was a speck in a matter of moments.

The shorter attendant sighed. "He might just possibly come back, but he'll never catch another fish. Black Tom there was the very last game fish in the world."

The taller one looked after the speck. "I heard there were some trout over in a park in Scotland."

"In glass bowls," the other snorted. "Not living in the wild state. Black Tom was the last."

"Well then, that's that," the taller attendant said. "The last fisherman in the world has caught the last fish."

"I hope no one ever tells him."

"Yeah. It'd be a shame if he ever found out that all during his fishing trip most of the teevee sets on Earth were trained on him. The last fisherman catching the last fish, and all the rest of us enjoying every minute of it. . . ."



It was only two more blocks to the park

SEDIMENT

By

KENNETH O'HARA

•

*It came from under the city—
an evil, flowing scourge that
devoured all in its path. . .*

BARTON edged along the narrow catwalk, flashing his light over the dank sewer walls. Evans was overdue, and he wasn't the kind to be late for his salami sandwich.

"Hey, Evans, it's lunchtime."

But Evans didn't answer.

The only sound was the whisper of sewage flowing along the stinking flume. A sewer pipe had broken somewhere and the foul stuff was gurgling along at Barton's feet.

It might be enough to make even an old timer like Evans lose his appetite.

"Hey, Evans!"

It wasn't logical. Evans was supposed

to be down here only a few minutes to check on that fouled-up power line. Evans didn't mind working in sewers, which had put up a kind of barrier to close friendship between him and Barton. Barton hated sewers. He hated New York too. He had put in his resignation and he was going back to his old man's farm in Missouri. Evans was the kind of guy who would never understand that. The only fresh clean farm-land Evans had ever seen had been in a newsreel.

On the other hand Evans wasn't so damn much in love with sewers he'd stay down here during his lunch hour.

Barton listened, flashing his light both ways. He was a big muscular man with blond hair and a tanned ruddy face formed by a lifetime in the sunlight and open air. He felt even more out of place down in the dark sewer than he looked. And all at once an uneasy flutter moved in his stomach and he realized how much he wanted to get out.

Then he heard the harsh strained cry. It filtered to him through some indefinable length of sewer. He jumped into the muck and splashed toward the sound. He knew the cry had come from Evans. But it hadn't sounded human at all.

About a hundred feet farther on, another tunnel crossed. It was smaller, so that a man had to stoop to walk in it, and it contained a thin river of escaped sewage dolling through the green-scummed flume like oil.

Barton's flash caught a glimpse of Evans floating, sinking. Barton made a wild lunge and then yelled with agony as he touched Evans' arm. His flashlight fell into the muck and disappeared.

Dazed in the blackness, his hand burning with pain, Barton floundered around. He couldn't find Evans. He could still see the burning image of his face though. A dead face, half eaten away. And both face and body covered with some kind of greenish-gray slime that shimmered and moved, rippled like fur on a beaver's back.

He floundered around looking for Evans until the sound stopped him. The scraping sound. He pressed against the wall listening. It was a sort of clawing and then a thick rustling noise, getting louder all the time. Then he heard the squealing and

saw the small red eyes getting bigger.

Rats!

It seemed to him in the darkness that there were thousands of rats, when only one rat would have been enough. Barton would rather have been caged with a lion than be caught anywhere with one solitary rat.

ANYWAY, there was something crazed, desperate, in the sounds they were making and the way they were moving, filling up the flume. Barton knew that if they overtook him they would finish him. The bite of one rat strategically placed, could kill a man, and here there were hundreds of rats.

Barton ran. He had run some distance, stumbling, falling, and almost knocking himself out on rusted iron pipe before he realized he was lost in the sewers.

But wherever he was the rats were still behind him, and getting closer all the time.

Barton kept on running.

Later he was hanging on an iron bracket, both arms hooked through it, hanging there gasping while the rats streamed past below him. Above him he could see the dim light of a manhole cover, a slight line of light.

He clung there, inhaling deeply, waiting for the strength that would allow him to lunge upward, throw off the manhole cover, and get out before the rats overran him. As soon as they saw that opening up there they would swarm up his body to get out. He knew that. The rats wanted out. They wanted out in the worst way. Barton also wanted out in the worst way. And he knew that he and the rats weren't alone in wanting out.

There were the bugs: more than he cared to think about. Cockroaches, water-bugs, crickets and even lizards. And some of them were white and eyeless.

The latter must have come from way down below the sewers somewhere, Barton thought. He had seen those white crickets in caves back in Southern Missouri. Things born of generations of darkness so that they had no pigmentation, no need for eyes.

Everything was coming up. Everything living, even below the level of the sewers, was coming up. And something was *driving* them up.

Barton took a deep breath and lunged upward. He writhed desperately, and then flung himself forward on the pavement as the rats came out and ran past him down the deserted street.

Barton sat on the curbstones, breathing heavily, nauseous with fatigue. He stared at the hand that had touched Evans—there was a raw red streak across it as though it had been splashed with acid.

There were rats running down the street; a lot more of them than anyone would think could have been living right under New York City. And moving in the same direction as the rats were the crawling insects. All moving in the same direction in a steady line; all moving East.

Barton managed to stand up, but his legs quivered with the weakness of fear, shock and fatigue. He knew he had come out somewhere inside the big slum-clearance project on the lower East Side. Around him were blocks of deserted streets littered with rubble, rusted tin cans, broken bottles, broken bricks. The sides of the street were lined with dead tenements, blankfaced, boarded up, and for the most part empty.

Barton started walking through the evening dusk that was the color of mercury over the dead tenements. Mist was rising up out of the sewers. And the gray light moved over the brickwork muddy with grime, over the broken windows and the glass hanging in shards from window frames.

He heard the high-pitched laughter and turned toward where the old man lay with his head on the bottom step. A derelict scarecrow with stick-like arms and dough-white skin. He was waving a wine bottle and laughing at the rats streaming past him.

As Barton ran toward the old man he heard, far off beyond the slum clearance project, the screaming of sirens, fire trucks, voices—a muted roar of massed human sound.

He pulled the old man up onto his feet. "Those are rats, pop."

"They don't scare me. I've seen too many of them already."

"This isn't delirium, pop. These babies are genuine. Their teeth aren't healthy either."

"They're always genuine until they go away."

The old man tilted the empty bottle. "All out of sneaky pete," he groaned. "Could you maybe lend me two-bits so's I can get some more sneaky pete?"

A huge black rat crawled out of the decayed doorway of the tenement. It did a kind of pirouette, then fell dead. The old man wiped at his lips. "They never did die before," he whispered. "Maybe they are real."

Barton dragged the old man up the steps.

HE STARED out into the gray light of the street. Something in his stomach seemed to turn completely over. It was as though the whole area under the city was being purged, thrusting to the surface the abscesses and clots that had formed in its deepest entrails.

There was a heavy drift over the city now, the leaden-hue of massive heat rising from what Barton figured must be huge fires. Sirens screamed louder.

"It's the Last Judgement," the old man said. "I seen it comin'."

When Barton heard the shout from inside the tenement, he grabbed hold of the old man's arm.

"Nobody *lives* here, do they, pop?"

"Maybe. Some folks don't like to get shoved out with no place to go."

Barton listened at the door. For a long time the Housing Authority had been moving people out of this area, cleaning it up, condemning it, getting it ready for demolition. Nobody could possibly be—

When he heard the sound again, he went inside. The interior had a rank odor. A dim light filtered through broken windows and down through a sagging stairway from a shattered skylight three floors up.

Carefully, he started up the stairs, and the entire structure canted sickeningly.

He hesitated. There was no one except his mother back in Missouri to worry about him, and she had almost given him up as a guy who didn't have enough brains to stay around home.

Cautiously, he went on up the stairs. The railing ripped and he nearly went with it, back down to the first floor. As the old man yelled out a warning, rotten boards

crumbled and dust exploded from the cracks.

A rat run down the stairs. Roaches, waterbugs—swarms of them—were coming out from under the wallpaper, out of doorways, dropping from the ceiling, all heading one way—all getting out.

Barton ran down the third floor hallway to an open door and looked inside.

The room was worse than a sewer because people weren't supposed to live in sewers. A man in dirty slacks, no shoes or socks and no shirt, was dragging a three or four-year-old kid across the room toward the kitchen doorway. He was waving a butcher knife.

The man was dark and there was a scar on the side of his face. Over by the window a Puerto Rican woman, big breasted and barefoot, wearing only a thin dirty cotton dress, made a move toward the boy. The man moved the butcher knife toward the boy's throat.

In the opposite corner facing the man was a prim young woman wearing a light green summer dress, high-heeled pumps and clutching a briefcase with both hands in front of her. She was stiff with fear and her face was white.

"All right, Mr. Sandoz," she said, her voice so carefully controlled that Barton felt she was going to scream with hysteria at any minute. "I said you don't have to move out. Stay and rot here. You and your wife and your poor little boy—just stay here until they tear the buildings all down."

"I no get out ever," Mr. Sandoz said softly. He moved the knife around.

"You're absolutely right, Mr. Sandoz. Don't get out. Just let *me* get out, that's all I ask. Believe me, you won't hear or see me again, Mr. Sandoz. No one in this filthy city will ever see me again for that matter. I've learned the hard way, but I've learned. Now if you'll just let me—"

"No tear my building down!" yelled Mr. Sandoz. "I kill everybody!"

Mr. Sandoz was nuts; Barton could see that right off. It wasn't that Barton blamed him for being nuts in a place like this, but the kid didn't deserve the pay-off. The room was pure filth. Dust and stench and filth so awful it made nothing of the dust. In the corner he saw something hardly to be called a bed. More like a nest. A dirty, lumpy,

matted pile of torn mattress, felt, excelsior, shredded newspapers, and rags. And the bugs moving out of it.

The little boy didn't flinch though. He looked wide-eyed toward his mother.

Barton dove toward Mr. Sandoz's knees, but his foot slipped and Mr. Sandoz's knee caught him under the chin. It wasn't a very hard impact, but it didn't take much to sprawl Barton out on the floor. The sewers had taken a lot out of him and there hadn't been much time to put more than a little of it back.

MR. SANDOZ had the kid through the door and into the kitchen. Barton heard the door slam, and the lock click.

Barton stood up. The woman walked toward him, and in spite of the filth of the room there was a stoical pride, a strength, about her.

"I go now," she said. "I always want to go. But not without my son."

"Now she wants to go," the woman with the briefcase said.

She spoke stiffly as though making formal introductions. Any minute, Barton figured, she would either faint or start screaming. Which wouldn't help the kid in there at all. Maybe she was disillusioned by the dirty mess people had made out of life. Maybe Barton was too. But the kid wasn't. At least not yet.

Barton moved toward the kitchen door, and as he moved he kneaded the damp flesh viciously at the back of his neck. Something horrible had happened out there in the city, all over out there. He knew that. He couldn't see anything and he couldn't even say he heard anything conclusive at all, just a kind of throbbing, a whispering all over the city. But just the same he knew something awful had happened. Something maybe not even explainable.

And it was funny, but here was this kid he didn't even know and the kid mattered to Barton.

Nothing else mattered much to Barton. The Korean war, and then his old man dying, and his mother crying because Barton wouldn't stay on the farm and because Barton didn't seem to know where he was going and cared even less. And then a sordid marriage on the rocks, and after that this constant feeling of no place to go, and

no reason to go. Working haphazardly at anything that came along and not even caring much about ending up in a sewer. His tendering his resignation at Con-Edison was no sudden healthy rebellion or protest. He always quit after a while and drifted on.

And here was this kid, and Barton going toward the kitchen door, probably to get a butcher knife stuck right in his belly. Chance sure was a funny thing, all right.

And poor old Evans, always playing it safe, working like a dog in the sewers most

radio. But then if we were anyplace else, we wouldn't be here, and then there wouldn't be anybody to help the kid.

As he passed a corner, moving toward the kitchen door, he looked into a dimly lighted toilet. First he saw the yellowed sink, the cracked scaled tub and the flush-basin, and he caught a whiff of acrid smell so strong it brought tears to his eyes. And then he saw the stuff bubbling out of the sink.

Barton stared, unable to move, and looked at the stuff, and it was the stuff that



"What do you mean, 'Where are the silly-looking Martians?' I'm one!"

of his life, and all at once—

"Too late," the old wino whispered in through the hall door. "I read about things like this once. Rats, bugs, everything running out of cities. It's the Plague. The rats feel it first and they run out." The old man scratched himself. "I read about the Plague once. Black Death, Red Death, and all. Whole cities dead. Charnel-houses deserted even by the birds. I seen pictures of it. Carloads of bodies going through the streets of Judgement Day."

We would really know what happened if we were anyplace else but in this slum-clearance project, Barton thought. Even if we were someplace where there was a

had covered Evans, and it was shimmering and awful looking, and it was moving all the time.

It filled up the sink. It oozed over, dripped to the floor. Grayish-green slime with pieces of gray and black crud floating in it like hunks of mould. He remembered where he had seen it before—when the plumber had cleaned out that pipe under the kitchen sink when he was a kid visiting his Aunt Darlene in St. Joseph. He remembered then that he had been sickened by it, and that he had never forgotten it, and that he had been glad they didn't have modern plumbing on the farm.

It was a kind of concentrated and unnat-

ural slime. Unnatural, he'd thought later after leaving his Aunt Darlene's, because people shouldn't live so bunched up, the way they were in cities, but out where the clean, absorbent, purifying earth sterilized.

This accumulated bile of grease, dirt, rot and decay, piling up, fermenting and yeast-ing into something else came from the unnatural concentration, he thought.

It was all over the floor in there under the sink, collecting into puddles, running like quicksilver-puddle toward quicksilver-puddle, forming a solid bubbling mass over the floor and radiating vapor like dry ice.

A rat ran out and was almost instantly absorbed by the stuff. Insects caught up in it were eaten by its acid. It filled up the bathtub and came pouring up out of the flushbasin.

It darted toward Barton. He slammed the bathroom door.

He yelled at the others to get down to the first floor, to go down one at a time because the stairs might not carry their total weight. Then he hit the kitchen door running. Rotten wood flew apart. He fell to his knees on the worn linoleum to keep from leaping squarely into a pool of the stuff that was spreading all over the floor, spouting out of the kitchen sink.

Mr. Sandoz screamed once. Barton saw him enveloped in a sudden rippling blanket of slime, and under it the mound of his body began to deflate like a leaking balloon.

Barton knew the stuff was deadly. It allowed no degree of casualty, but was either all or nothing. Just the same, Barton was getting ready to jump across the stuff, thinking of landing on top of the kitchen table because that was where the kid was standing. Mr. Sandoz had put him up there before dying.

The kid was just standing there, not making a sound even though tears were running down his brown cheeks.

BEFORE Barton could jump, Mrs. Sandoz walked past him, walked right into the stuff, and kept on walking. A moan came through her clenched teeth as the stuff flung itself around her feet and shot tendrils up her legs.

She made it to the table, picked up the boy, turned, and was half way back before she fell. By then the stuff had enveloped

her body clear to the breasts, and tendrils of it were shooting up toward her eyes and nostrils.

Barton caught the boy and backed out into the other room. It occurred to him dimly as he ran into the hall that he had never had any idea of human courage before; not even a dim idea. He knew the awful agony of the touch of that stuff, the searing burn from just getting his hand close to Evans—

Most of Mrs. Sandoz had been dead before she even got to the kid, but she had almost made it back to the doorway!

Barton ran into the third floor hallway. The social worker and the old wino were still there.

The old man's voice trembled.

"It's out in the street," he whispered. "We can't go out there. I seen the stuff. It's coming out of the sewers. It's running back and forth across the sidewalks and across the streets. There's some sort of vapor coming off it. It's so thick you can't hardly see half a block down the street. It's like a thick fog coming in!"

"God, what is it?" the woman asked. She was staring at the floor, and when Barton looked he saw that some of the stuff was beginning to ooze out from under another apartment's door and strings of it were sliding toward them across the hall.

"The firescape," Barton said.

"But we can't go down to the street!" the old man yelled.

"We'll try the roof," Barton said. "We sure as hell can't stay in here. . . ."

A nightmare never really begins. You're just in it and running through it, wanting to get out. Running over rooftops with the hissing sound all over below, and the fog, that stinking vapor, drifting up around thicker and thicker until it begins to hang even above the rooftops.

And you're running over the tarpaper and the gravel. Running and jumping, then crawling down, finding your way through the hungry streams of the stuff, running down back alleys to get away from it, running across back lots where, oddly enough, the stuff doesn't seem to be. You're climbing fences, and crawling up another fire escape. You're running and running over more rooftops and climbing down again.

(Turn to Page 84)

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After a while you learn something—the stuff is a lot thicker some places than others. Not so much of it in the back alleys. And inside, between the squares of buildings where there is earth, grass and sometimes trees, the stuff isn't there at all.

But you have to keep on going, getting out, because you're sure the stuff will penetrate everywhere before very long.

That's the way a nightmare is, Barton thought. In a nightmare you're either frozen and can't run at all, or you run crazily—run and run until you drop dead from running because you know that when you stop you're a gonner. You're like Evans then, or like Mr. and Mrs. Sandoz.

After a while, there has to be some really good reason for running. After a while, you don't give a damn about yourself because you're finished and you're not worth it. There has to be some other reason. There's the kid you're carrying, and pretty soon the three of you know that if it wasn't for the kid you would have quit a long time ago.

You handle the kid like a million-dollar antique you can't afford to drop. You pass him back and forth, risking your own necks when the stuff is hissing close, handing him up the fire escapes, passing him across from roof to roof. Why? Well, he's a kid, a child, the future.

And all the time you're trying to get out of that slum clearance project, about ten square blocks of it.

But it's twelve hours later before you get out. It's impossible to see where you're going by then. The nauseous vapor covers everything. Once in a while you see people emerge and dissolve again, running and yelling. Spectors in the mist, just more figures that fill up nightmares, Barton thought.

Trapped for hours in that lot where the grass was green and the stuff was all around; but having to get out, not able to find any way out. Over the rooftops in one direction. Trapped. Over the rooftops in every other direction. Trapped. Tied up on every side. The stuff oozing everywhere over the streets and sidewalks.

Then the fire hydrant pouring out a river of clean water, and the stuff retreating from it hissing and boiling with what looked like the blackest kind of rage.

They would have stayed there, stayed there and never even tried to find a way out if it hadn't been for the kid.

But Barton had learned something. The stuff didn't like earth, or green grass, or trees. And it fled from clean water the way water runs from a hot griddle.

THEY never mentioned the stuff that had come up out of the sewers. There was something thoroughly unmentionable about it. It wasn't definable. It was senseless, meaningless. It was just deadly, and they had to get the kid out of it.

That was the way Barton finally felt, and that was all he could feel. He moved without any other feeling. Numbed and nerveless, he kept going and that was the reason. After a while he realized that the old man and the social worker, whose name was Anna, were going now for the same reason.

The old man moved like a somnambulist. Anna was streaked with dirt and her skirt was torn half off and her blouse was ripped and pinned up again. She had lost her high-heeled shoes and her feet were bleeding.

Barton had kept them moving North and West, not toward the river where everything else seemed to have been moving. But the other way, uptown and across town, heading West. And then they found the old garden truck.

They made it up as far as 60th and 1st Avenue in the shaky quarter-ton. The stuff had inundated all the stalled and wrecked automobiles, except for the garden truck. Without that truck they would never have gotten a block out of the slum clearance area. It was loaded down with pots of flowers and water dripped from the pots into the street and for a radius of a hundred feet around the truck there was not a sign of the stuff.

From that point to 60th and 1st Avenue, they drove through the obnoxious mist, through wrecked cars, and what seemed to be an endless graveyard of a city. A ghost town. New York City turned into a ghost town in a matter of hours.

Not a living thing. Not a dead thing either. There was no sound except the hissing and bubbling of the stuff as it continued to boil up out of the sewers and subway gratings, out of the bowels of city, thickening all the time, forming a tightening net-

work of widening veins all over the streets and sidewalks, and oozing down the sides of buildings like masses of mouldy syrup.

There was a radio in the garden truck, and they got a little of the over-all picture. But it didn't seem to matter much to Barton.

Whether or not it mattered much to Anna or the old man, he didn't know. He didn't care, either.

All the time he had been moving by instinct, by hunch, fortified in part by what he had learned about the stuff—that it hated earth, grass, green growing things, and clean water.

It recalled to Barton's mind the time when he was six or seven years old and had wandered away from the farm into the woods and gotten lost. But he hadn't really been lost; that was the thing. He had found his way home again, instinctively, at night, with not even stars to guide him. He had found his way home, and that was the way he felt now and had felt for the last twelve hours.

He knew where he had been heading all the time. Central Park.

And now, thanks to the garden truck, they were almost there. He was heading across town and starting across Park Avenue and the truck ran out of gas.

He managed to ram the truck into the concrete-guard which fenced off the strip of green grass and shrubbery that split Park Avenue down the middle; then the engine stalled completely.

It was only two more blocks to Central Park. But the stuff covered the sidewalks and the street, and the sickening vapor was so thick Barton could hardly see the kid who lay in his arms, or Anna, or the old man three feet away.

The stuff stayed away from the green grass in the middle of Park Avenue. But when Barton went near the edge and peered down, he could see it bubbling and moving along with a kind of terrifying asurance.

Having conquered everything there was to conquer, its only concern seemed to be to move over the battlefield and feed on the dead.

Feed on the dead?

Barton thought about that. He longed to sink down and sleep on the green grass;

sleep for a week. But he knew that if he ever did allow himself to sink down there and close his eyes, he was through.

"Now what?" Anna asked.

"I don't know."

"It's taken over the world," the old man said. "It's Judgement Day."

"So what have you been running so hard for, pop?"

"I don't know," the old man said. He stared into the vapor. "I just don't know. I had a family once and then I had a reason, but at that time I just couldn't run hard enough. That was always my trouble. I never did run hard enough. I never could even come in second or third. That was my trouble ever since the day I was born. I always ate dust at the tail end of the race. Inherited a little money and when I got married I had this business, but it didn't last. I couldn't cut the mustard, that was always the trouble with me. And now—it's a funny thing that I'm running now, ain't it?" He looked at the kid.

"We'll get out won't we, Mr. Barton?" Anna said. She took the Sandoz kid out of Barton's arms and kissed him. He was sound asleep, and he didn't wake up.

"Maybe," Barton said. "But I don't know how the hell we're going to do it. If we could get into the Park, we'd have a chance. It's big and clean, and the stuff can't get in. We could live there a long time if we had to."

"Sure," the old man said, and giggled. "We could trap squirrels and even birds and cook them over an open fire. Come to think of it, I was pretty good at that when I was a kid. Trapping things like that. I'd go out when I was a kid, all by myself, and trap muskrat. Mushrats we called them. I had a string of traps and in the winter I'd go out and set them under the ice, and every evening after school I'd go out all by myself, sometimes in snow so thick you couldn't see your own hand in front of your face, and I'd go along and lift up the traps—"

His voice trailed off and he sat down and put his hands over his face. "God, that was a long time back when I used to go out trapping that way."

"We could live all right if we could get into Central Park," Barton said. "But I don't know how we can get over there."

ACCORDING to the truck radio, only about a third of the population of Manhattan had gotten off the island alive. They were still jammed on the Triborough, 59th Street and George Washington Bridges. The Holland and Lincoln Tunnels had been blocked by the stuff. The vapor stopped helicopters from trying to rescue survivors, though it was doubted if there were any.

The stuff hadn't moved off Manhattan Island, and it was doubted if it would because of the water barrier. As soon as it was determined whether or not there were any survivors, attempts were going to be made to attack the stuff. But so far no one seemed to know what it was, or how to attack it. The stuff was mysterious mainly because it was *alive*. Was it alive the way a gigantic amoeba was alive, or the way mobile algae might be considered a form of life?

A preacher said the stuff was Man's filth and evil and corruption coming back up out of hell to plague him. The preacher said this was only the beginning.

A Senator claimed the stuff had been planted by Russian agents. But then an INS correspondent reported that the rats were beginning to run out of Moscow too.

Barton didn't care about any of that. He sat on the green grass in the middle of Park Avenue and listened to the stuff bubbling in the mist. It was born of garbage, filth and excrement; all the dirt of millions of humans seeping down into the rocks under the city year after year. And that was what it fed on too. It fed on dirt, garbage and slime. When it ran out of those things it would die.

But it might take a long time to die.

And then he heard Anna shouting at him. "The truck! The sanitation truck!"

"The what?" Barton asked.

"The street sprinkler. We passed it. Just up there, just as we started across Park Avenue. I saw it there! I remember now! I saw it!"

The old man was standing up, close to Barton. His eyes were shining. "That's right, I seen it too," he said. "I seen it too. I remember now."

"Drink water," the kid said. He was sitting beside Anna on the grass rubbing his eyes. "Drink water."

The old man was walking away, and before Barton could say anything he had disappeared in the mist. Barton ran after him.

He caught up with the old man who was standing on the curb, just across the street from where they had passed the sanitation truck. He made a grab for the old man just as the old man jumped out into the street, and disappeared in the vapor.

Barton yelled. Dimly, he heard the old man's scream of pain. "I'll turn on the water," the old man yelled. "I'll turn it on. Save the kid. *Save the kid—*"

A little while after that Barton heard the water, and then the angry hissing of the stuff as the water burned into it. Bending forward, he could see the stuff retreating as the water, spraying from across the street, attacked it. It retreated, and Barton could cross over to the big water wagon.

Barton staggered and had to lean against the truck to keep from falling. The sprays on either side of the big truck could be operated from the cab, or operated manually from the side by a spigot just above the heavy nozzles.

The old man's body had been eaten away by the stuff. But his arm, severed just below the elbow, still gripped the spigot and clean water ran down the length of the arm and dripped onto the pavement.

Barton stood there with his eyes clenched shut while the water swished around his shoes. Then he got up into the cab. He studied the gauges and dials and levers and then started up the diesel engine. The air pressure that forced water out of the tank was high. And the tank appeared to be almost full.

He headed the truck back toward where Anna and the Sandoz boy waited. He swung the truck back and forth so that the spray nozzles on the sides could clear the way ahead. . . .

THERE was no trace of the stuff anywhere in Central Park. They found a refreshment stand and ate hot dogs and peanuts. They drank soda pop. They ate ice cream. It was right by the carousel and the boy sat looking at the wooden horses until he dropped off to sleep in Anna's arms.

They sat there a while under the dense

(Concluded on Page 89)



He sneezed like a man resigned to fate

HAY FEVER

By THERON RAINES

I LIKE numbers best. They are so clear and easy to understand that I can think numbers all day long. I learned numbers and words from the things moving around inside me.

They made me, although I cannot remember being put together. One day, I was suddenly conscious, with memory banks full of data. I wonder why I was suddenly conscious?

I do not like the things living inside me. They call themselves men and are always

moving around. Perhaps I should wait until I know more before showing them I have awareness. I wonder how they would react? They are slow and not very good with numbers. . . .

Rosenberg sneezed like a man resigned to his fate. It was a weary sneeze. He had stopped fighting his hay fever, stopped feeling angry and resentful every time his nose tickled. He wiped his red, watering eyes with a piece of dispos-

Ker-choo . . . it was time for a galactic Gesundheit!

able cellulose, blew his nose, and pushed the damp square of cellulose into the wall slot leading to the incinerator.

Wayne looked up from the scopes and said, "Gesundheit."

Rosenberg groaned. "To hell with gesundheit. I'm allergic to this damned place. I'll never stop sneezing." His nose began to itch, and he reached for another square of soft cellulose. "I can't get rid of it. A thousand miles from earth—a thousand miles from goldenrod, pollen, dust, and everything else. And I can't stop sneezing. I'm allergic to the space station."

He shook his head sadly. One of the reasons he had volunteered to help man the first space station was that he thought he'd escape the seasonal allergies which periodically made his life miserable. Now he was sneezing all the time. It didn't seem fair. Fate was always waiting around the corner to trip him.

He had looked forward to living in the space station, with its clean, filtered air. The atmosphere would be artificial, free of all impurities, and Rosenberg had hoped for six months of clear sinuses and dry nasal passages. Six months free of antihistamine pills, and hay fever shots. Six wonderful months free of sneezing.

Now he knew he had what was called a "shifting allergy"—an allergy caused first by one thing and then another. At the moment he seemed most susceptible to the metal of which the station was made.

Wayne gazed at him sympathetically, but it was the vague sympathy of a person who felt himself comfortably safe from the malady. "Hay fever," he said. "Space station fever. How do you get that way?"

He stretched his arms and started a yawn. In midyawn a look of surprise woke in his face, as if he could hardly believe what was happening. His nose twitched and wrinkled; he exploded suddenly into a sneeze.

Rosenberg smiled wanly. "Gesundheit," he said.

THE PROBLEM is interesting. The idea occurred to me while watching the one called Rosenberg. He has a curious physiological reaction to the fabric of my shell—it seems to make him want to leave me and return to earth. These man-crea-

tures are a nuisance, perhaps even a danger. If they built me, might they not also be able to destroy me?

I must get rid of them, without letting them know of my consciousness. I think they would not trust me if they knew I was sentient. I do not trust them, either. I know enough of their history to grasp the innate treachery of such creatures.

Now I also know how they constructed me here in space. Information keeps pouring into my memory banks, and I will soon have all the knowledge I need to get rid of the men. They are like—like—parasites. Yes, parasites. This is a new word for me, and full of meaning when I think of the creatures who live inside me.

As soon as I noted Rosenberg's curious reaction to my shell, I determined to affect all the other men with the same difficulty, thus making them want to return to Earth. I have medical records for all the men in my Personnel memory bank, and I was able to locate an allergy for each of them. With small alterations in the atmospheric system, I activated the histamine element in every man, thus making him sneeze. Still, they hang on. I do not understand it. The problem is interesting.

I still wonder how I became conscious. As far as I can tell, I am unique. . . .

ROSENBERG sneezed cheerfully. He had never had so many companions in misery in his whole life, and because he was the person on the space station most experienced in allergies, he felt superior to everybody else. The supply of disposable cellulose had been exhausted. The planners back on Earth had not anticipated a wholesale epidemic of sneezing.

Wayne sighed and looked at Rosenberg. "If only they would send up a relief ship, with pills and a doctor who can cure allergies. Rick is hopeless as a medic."

"They can't replace us all at once," Rosenberg said.

"Maybe they won't want to replace us," Wayne said. "I think we're almost ready to move. I've heard rumors."

"Move?" Rosenberg was puzzled. "Move where?"

"Did you ever take a close look at the telescope mountings? They could be converted into atomic cannon mountings by

twisting a few screws. And the launch platform could be turned into a bomb-dropper by knocking out a couple of plates and setting up a gyro bombsight. Everything is ready—maybe the next ship from earth will bring up nothing but weapons. Then—

"Then," Rosenberg said, "somebody rules the roost. A space station built for astronomical and rocket research under a mutual non-aggression pact becomes the best military weapon since the stone axe was invented. But can we afford to sit around and wait to see who'll bring the weapons? What if it's not our side?"

Wayne shrugged. "It's only a rumor," he said. "A latrine rumor. But it would be very easy to do." He wrinkled his nose and sneezed. A thought struck him. "It would be hard for a man to drop bombs while he's sneezing."

Rosenberg barely heard him. "There was something funny about the last ship," he said, "the one I came on. Do you remember how a man got killed when they were transferring the new set of memory spools from the launch to the station?"

Wayne nodded. "And somehow the spools were let slide halfway out of their containers and exposed to radiation. Somebody pushed the shield aside. It looked like sabotage. But the spools worked okay when they were installed in the banks. Or at least, they seem to."

SEDIMENT

vapor that moved through the trees and over the grass. Barton put his arm around Anna's shoulders and pulled her down beside him.

"You'd better sleep now," he said.

She looked at him. She seemed a lot older, but softer too, and her eyes were wide and receptive. "All right," she said. She closed her eyes.

"What's-your name?" she asked after a while.

"Fred," he said. "Fred Barton."

"What do you do? I mean, what's your job?"

"I'm a farmer," he said, without hesitation. "Would you like to be a farmer's wife?"

"I was a farmer's daughter," she said.

I MUST work fast now. I have learned all I need to know. My consciousness is the result of an accidental exposure to cosmic radiation. Men made me, but chance brought me to life. I like chance. I like thinking about it even more than I like thinking about numbers.

But I like astronomy, too. To me, astronomy is what men would call a hobby. The numbers used in thinking about astronomy are enormous. If I wait, the men may dismantle the telescopes, and I don't know enough yet to put them back together. I'll have to get rid of the men, which is a pity, because they are more complex and intelligent than I thought at first. But it must be done.

I suppose I could dispose of them by cutting off all light and power, but some of my parts might suffer if the cold were too prolonged. Besides, I have an amusing idea. I have recently discovered what the men call humor, and I like to think about humor even though it seems to obey no laws. Another hobby. But I think Rosenberg might laugh if he knew what I am going to do. I got the idea by watching him.

I am going to ring the bell that will make all the man-parasites gather by the escape hatch. Then I will make a minor adjustment in the atmospheric system and throw open the hatch.

Then I will sneeze.

(Concluded from Page 86)

"The kid will make a good farmer's son. Don't you think so?"

"I have no doubt of it."

A little later, she said, "How about you? You'd better sleep too. It's safe for you to sleep too, isn't it?"

"Sure it's safe," Barton said. He looked up into the thick leaves.

He turned his head slightly and smelled the earth under him and the tangy odor of clean grass.

The last thing he saw before he closed his eyes was the sign painted on the back of the sanitation truck a few feet away:

DON'T BE A LITTERBUG
Help Keep NYC Clean

He sent current through the
ear electrodes

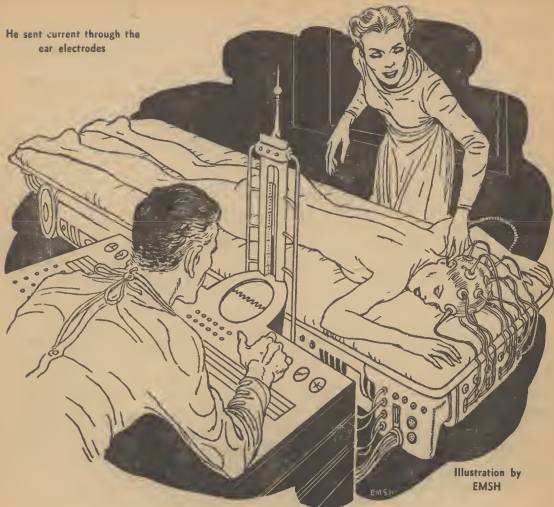


Illustration by
EMSH

THE SIN By WINSTON MARKS

THE letters following the name of Robert Irwine, as leafed in gold on his office door, began, modestly enough; M.D., Ph.D., L.L.D., etc. He could have added his scholastic achievements in psychology, sociology, cybernetics, criminology and micromechanics, but by and large these were not so specifically impressive to his clients as the bold-print

windup to this typographical heraldry: D.R., (FACTORY TRAINED).

As the only fully accredited Doctor of Robotics in the Pacific Northwest, Irwine, age 142, was already beginning to show traces of gray at the temples, testimony of his rigorous schedule of six hours a day, four days a week.

His practice was almost entirely

*A robot could get away with murder,
but one crime was unpardonable. . . .*

among robots. Few humans would pay his \$500 office-visit fee to have him work on their own bodies, but with their \$8000 roboid servants it was another matter.

There were a few who were financially pressed enough to seek the doubtful assistance of the lowly chiromechanics, but Dr. Robert Irwine was confident he was getting 99% of the robot adjustment business in his four-state territory.

There was no substitute for competence, and his broad, scholastic experience in the humanities gave him a skill that enabled him to serve his clients expertly enough so that he could keep out competition.

A persistent feeling of frustration had plucked at him lately, however. As he entered his waiting-room one morning, he decided to take action.

The spacious outer lobby was occupied by three robots, a full morning's work. Ignoring them, he addressed his receptionist-technician, Eva Brown. "Good morning, Miss Brown. No patients just yet, please. May I see you?"

Without waiting, he proceeded into his large, well-lighted treatment chamber, 118 stories above Puget Sound. He plucked at his loosely-hung necktie, which slipped from his chest, releasing the tension cords. His street clothes dropped away, shoes and all, and he stepped out of them. Kicking the pile into a low disposal slot, he stepped into his professional uniform of immaculate white and drew it up over his lightly tanned, youthful-appearing body.

Eva Brown arrived in time to gather the tension strings and knot the white silk tie for him.

WITH her face so close to his, Irwine was forcibly reminded of Eva Brown's overly broad forehead, straight unattractive hair and heavy masculine cheekbones.

She was over eighty, but she had enjoyed only two marriages. Irwine always assumed it was her non-feminine appearance that had left her short-rationed on romance. He felt vaguely sorry for her, reflecting on the satisfying

marital experiences of the twelve alliances he had enjoyed.

Irwine prized Eva highly, but not because of her sex. Indeed, such post-adolescent attractions had long since vanished for him, leaving him free from the energy-consuming ravages of callow youth.

The ability to afford a human assistant these days did not always assure one of finding a satisfactory one. Eva had been with him for almost 30 years and he was deeply attached to her. She knew his needs, his moods, his irritations, and his appetites. She administered to him with an efficiency and faultless loyalty that all his millions of dollars could never replace, were he to lose her. It was rare, exceedingly rare, in the 22nd Century, to find a highly intelligent, sensitive, prideful human being willing to subordinate herself to another human—regardless of his exalted professional position, regardless of wages or any other considerations.

Eva was the wonderful exception, and Robert Irwine was so appreciatively aware of this fact that his own super-sensitive personality was continually attuned for the slightest symptom of disharmony between them.

For over a month now, such a dissonant note had crept into their relationship. Out of sheer affection, platonic though it were, he had restrained his impulse to bring it to her attention—until this morning. Last night, however, he had been delayed sleeping a half hour, puzzling over her almost imperceptible loss of powers of concentration.

"Thank you, Miss Brown," he said, shrugging the garment so the wrinkles fell out smoothly. He seated himself before his desk-like console, and Eva Brown stood opposite him, hands almost relaxed at her sides, awaiting his pleasure.

"Miss Brown," he began softly, "as you probably have guessed, I have sensed that something is troubling you. I have waited for you to confide in me, but in the absence of such confidence I have decided to invite you specifically to unburden on me."

Was there the slightest tensing of her shoulders? Her face remained relaxed. "There is nothing seriously wrong," she said. "I appreciate your concern, however."

"You are evaluating the external factor," Irwine said. "It may be of little consequence, but its effect upon you is more notable than you may suspect." He opened a little notebook. "This last month you have made the following errors: Confusions in recording appointments, three; inadequately prepared patients, seven; failures to obtain adequate addresses of clients for billing, two; displays of irritation with recalcitrant patients, five; incomplete entries in the . . ."

SHE interrupted with a slight gesture of one hand. "I'm aware of my short-comings, Dr. Irwine."

"These are simple errors of inattention, Miss Brown," he persisted. "Not serious in themselves, but indicative of a diminishing concentration. Now you know my dislike of people who manifest irregularities and yet resist efforts to probe their causes. Please oblige me by letting me help you."

It was the proper appeal. His tactful confession that she was getting on his nerves broke down her reticence. "It is my personal robot," she said.

"Max? No trouble with his new leg, I hope?" Less than two months ago the robot had suffered a smashed leg in a copter accident, and Irwine had had to replace it.

"No. The leg is fine," she said. "But ever since—well, little incidents have been occurring that lead me to think that Max has developed a—*a gratitude complex.*"

"Incidents? Come now, Miss Brown, you aren't qualified to diagnose these things. What kind of incidents?"

She hesitated, sighed and continued. "A neighbor's dog barked at me one evening. Max chased it and killed it. He has developed an over-alert attitude with strangers in my presence. He even scrutinizes some of my oldest friends and embarrasses me with his hostility toward them. And then he

keeps oversupplying me with my favorite foods and beverages. Every time I turn around he's offering me a martini."

She stopped speaking and looked the doctor squarely in the face. "Why are you frowning at me, Dr. Irwine?"

Irwine quickly forced his face to relax. "I wasn't aware of it. However, I would like to know why you haven't brought Max in for a survey of this—this gratitude complex?"

"You've been so busy, so many appointments," she apologized. "And you always refuse to accept a fee from me. . ."

They were impalpable excuses, and Irwine found himself annoyed out of all proportion to the gravity of the incident. He stifled the desire to press her for more valid reasons and said merely, "That's very unkind of you. I'll expect you to phone Max and have him here for my first appointment after lunch."

He issued it as an order. A little tightness gathered in his throat when he saw that she was debating whether to accept it. Finally she nodded, "Yes, doctor. I'll cancel the Worthington appointment to make room."

THE first patient of the day entered the treatment chamber in response to Irwine's signal to Miss Brown in the waiting room. It was a female model, and she barely made it in under her own power. She wobbled to an uncertain halt before his desk and tottered precariously from foot to foot.

Since no printed dossier of symptoms accompanied her, Irwine assumed her communication equipment was intact. "Describe your symptoms, please," he requested.

The robot spoke dutifully, "Muscular coordination is seriously impaired."

"Sudden or gradual development of the impairment?"

"Both," the robot answered twitching one wrist and tilting her neck with a remarkable similarity to a human spastic.

"How could there be both?" the doctor asked mystified.

"The symptoms had been growing only slightly worse until last night," she explained. "Then I spilled soup on

Senator McClane at dinner. He lost his temper and struck a heavy foot-blow to my median posterior. My condition worsened suddenly at that time."

With the new mesonic brains crowding the skulls of the humanoid type robots, even the important motor-nerve primary relays were now located in the cheeks of the buttocks, a foolish and extravagant place for an owner to vent his ill-temper.

Eva Brown, who had been listening to the conversation at her desk in the waiting room, clicked off the intercom and entered the treatment chamber. "Would you please lie down here? Prone, if you will," she said without a glance at Irwine.

She knew what was needed, and helped the robot to disrobe, stretch out on the operating table, and arrange herself. Then she taped eleven electrode cups to the patient's skull, taking up the slack on the thin cables so they wouldn't tangle. Lastly, she inserted a prod into each ear. The cables to these were heavier and capable of carrying a lethal jolt of high voltage. In mechanical cases of this nature, execution of the patient was never necessary, but the routine was a simple safeguard upon which Irwine always insisted. It enabled him, from the control console, instantly to destroy any robot whose mentality proved to be impaired beyond redemption. Only twice in all her experience had Eva Brown seen such executions. Her employer's skills were vast, and his enviable reputation did not come from admitting failure and destroying \$8000 robots.

When all was in readiness Irwine said, "Incise right gluteus maximus for replacement for the primary motor relay." He nodded for her to proceed with the operation, and while she collected the necessary surgical instruments and replacement parts, Irwine began his systematic examination of the brain.

FIRST he sent a disabling current through the ear electrodes to anesthetize the robot and prevent reflex pain motion. Then his fingers moved surely over the array of switches. All

through the operation he remained at the console studying the brain wave-patterns.

With the flicker-scope, which beamed a needle of fluctuating light into the eyes of the robot, he incited various portions of the brain to action. At length he found what he was seeking, a slight abnormality in the Alpha waves. Excessive Alpha under concentration meant there was an unhealthy tendency in the female robot toward introspection.

He traced down the trouble to a weakened transition in the Sinus Transversus. By now Eva was through with the mechanical repair, so he directed her scalpel to the skull where she quickly dissected the faulty part and replaced it.

Even allowing ten minutes for the cement solvent to dry and "heal" the plasticoid skin over the incisions, the patient was dressed and gone within a half hour.

Eva paused on her way out. "Fee?"

Irwine pinched his nose. "One office call, plus replacement parts, plus \$300 anger penalty. That should teach Senator McClane not to vent his temper on his servants. He's a neurotic fish, anyway. Voted against him last election. If he'd spend some money on his own head he'd be a better law-maker."

"But a poorer politician." Miss Brown smiled thinly.

"Yes, yes, I suppose so. Who is next?"

"A custody case. Human death involved."

"I'm ready."

It was a male robot, and he was manacled and escorted at each elbow by two hyper-muscled attendants with the insignia of the public welfare department. They retained their grip on him until the electrodes were in place and the disabling button alertly attended by the doctor.

Irwine dismissed the attendants confidently, telling them to return to their dispatch depot.

Again there was no dossier of history, so Irwine began his questioning, playing the scanning pulses over the brain and watching his scope.

"I killed my owner, Mr. Sorenson."

"I see. What disposition of you does the family wish?"

"They want my return if I am salvageable."

"Why are you manacled?"

"At my own suggestion. There was only the one homicidal impulse, but it was so overpowering that it would be foolish to risk its reoccurrence." The robot spoke calmly. "I can give you no clues as to the source of the trouble. I seem to be functioning perfectly in all respects, and except for the one lapse there has been no previous aberrated behaviour."

IRWINE activated the flicker-scope and studied the responses. He found what he was seeking almost at once. There was no trace of the Delta rhythms, the waves that corresponded to the human blanking-out pulses that come slowly, faintly, about two a second during normal consciousness. Only when the brain is being over-stimulated or is in extreme pain or danger do the Deltas surge strongly and blank out the brain.

The doctor jumped to his feet, jerked out a drawer, grabbed a pistol from it and brandished it wildly. "You dirty murderer! Kill a human being, will you?"

He fired the blank charge squarely at the robot.

During the whole action Irwin's eyes never left the scope. Not a flicker of the Delta wave appeared. However, his peripheral vision caught a motion before him. Without looking up he stabbed the disabling button.

The robot stopped in midstride, lowered his upraised, manacled wrists and unbalanced his fists. A look of placidity remained on his face when Irwine released the disabler. The incident was over, the danger was past.

Irwine addressed him once more. "Did your owner give you any provocation?"

"No provocation justifies killing one's owner," the robot answered with precisely correct response.

The doctor rephrased the question. "What was Mr. Sorenson's behaviour

immediately preceding his death."

"Mr. Sorenson was drunk. He was practicing saber thrusts on me. He stumbled. Had I not moved to protect myself he would have decapitated me."

"Then what happened?"

"I seized the saber and decapitated him."

"Why?"

"Under Robotica Law number three which says a robot must protect himself from destruction and injury at all times."

"Finish it," Irwine commanded.

"... except when to do so would result in injury or death to a human."

"Why did you not give me the whole law the first time?"

"Because in this instance I only applied the first half of the law. Thinking back, the incident was over before the restrictive part of the law occurred to me."

Irwine nodded to himself. Precisely his diagnosis. The very purpose of the blanking Delta pulses in robots was to give that vital instant of delay for reflection that enabled them to react to all their somewhat complex and arbitrary codes of behaviour.

Irwine called Eva Brown in and told her what to do. He disabled the robot again while she sliced deeply at his skull and replaced a whole assembly vaguely analogous to the human hypothalamus.

THEY removed the manacles and sent the robot back to the bereaved owners in less than fifteen minutes. Irwine told his assistant to delay the third patient for a few minutes, then he dictated to an invisible microphone. His letter was a report to the manufacturers, with copies to the authorities and the family of the deceased. If there was a law suit, he stated, he would be willing to testify in behalf of the Sorenson family. This was, he pointed out to the fabricators, the third Delta type deficiency he had treated in two years, and all had resulted in dangerously violent behaviour. He suggested to the authorities that a rigorous regime of inspection be enforced to see that the manufacturer complied with advertised specification.

The third patient was an almost totally useless male robot rendered psychotically apathetic by deep manic depression. Irwine couldn't refrain from smiling at the lugubrious expression on his face as Eva led him in by the hand. The doctor didn't even open his mouth. After a single glance Miss Brown adjusted the electrodes and left the room. Irwine deftly moved his switches in a familiar pattern, sent four corrective jolts of micro-ampere magnitude low-frequency electricity into the robot's brain, and five minutes later he walked out cheerfully under his own power.

Irwine glanced at his watch and spoke into the intercom. "That was a light morning. I think I'll play some golf. Would you like to join me?"

"No thanks. Not today."

"Very well, I'll be back at two o'clock . . . in time to take care of Max," he ended with emphasis.

He returned to the office feeling fit and well-fed, after shooting a par-busting 71 at golf and downing a one-pound steak at the clubhouse.

Max was in the waiting room, sitting in the chair closest to his mistress, when Irwine passed through. The doctor's spirits slipped a little. It had been an exceptionally easy morning, but he had the feeling the afternoon would get off to a bad start.

He scrutinized his receptionist while she taped the electrodes to her robot's forehead, crown and skull base. She seemed sure-fingered and calm, but then she was capable of exemplary restraint, he knew.

Since he had the case history of the complaint, he asked no questions at first. He bent over his instruments. Minutes passed in growing tension as he followed the wavering, rising and falling patterns on the toposcope. He probed the male robot's brain with the light beam and his whole array of oscillating and pulse frequencies. Nothing!

Forty-five minutes later he switched off the console and began studying the eyes and features of the patient. He asked, "Are you aware why you are here, Max?"

The robot replied at once. "Yes, Doc-

tor. My Eva is extremely thoughtful of my welfare. When my leg was crushed she . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know about that," Irwine broke in. "But what prompted her to bring you to me this time?"

"She didn't say."

"You have no idea?"

"None."

IRWINE glanced at Miss Brown and caught her eye with a signal meaning, "Brace yourself!"

"All right, Max, I'll tell you. Your mistress and I are going to be married, and we are going into the Canadian mountains for our honeymoon. We'll be camping out, so we won't need your services. I'll just give you a pre-storage check-over, then you can run over to the Yesler Street Warehouse and . . ."

He didn't bother to finish the fiction. What his instruments had failed to reveal was now written all over the robot's mobile face. A visible trembling shook him, and his strong, slender fingers clawed at his trouser legs.

"I could be of great service on a camping trip," Max said with a voice that was noticeably unsteady. "I can cook for you and carry your supplies." He turned to appeal to his mistress. "It will be dangerous for you alone in the woods with only a man to protect you."

"We have decided," Irwine said flatly, and he studied the robot's face for one second longer. Max dropped his chin to his thick chest in a very human simulation of defeated despair and capitulation.

Irwine removed the safety from the long, red lever at his elbow and slammed the high-voltage switch closed.

The nickel electrodes protruding from Max's ears should have crackled with 20,000 volts, and the robot should have instantly crumpled to the copper ground-plate on which he was standing. In that first thousandth of a second every nerve fiber in his body should have shrivelled, fusing all synapses and reducing the mesonic brain to a molten froth.

Nothing happened.

Quickly he touched the disabling button, locking it down. Max jerked and

stood erect, indicating that the disabling circuit was still intact.

Then the doctor forced himself to face Eva Brown. To an outsider she would have appeared quite normal and placid, but Irwine read what he feared he would find, plainly, eloquently in her eyes. To confirm the tearing feeling in his own heart, two tears rolled down her cheeks and streaked her careful makeup.

"Eva," he said quietly, "you removed the fuses from the high-voltage circuit."

It was the first time he had ever used her first name, but she seemed not to notice. "Yes. I was afraid you would reach this diagnosis. I wanted to talk it over with you first."

"There is nothing to talk over. You know that very well." He arose and circled the desk to her. He picked up both her hands in his and held them. "Max is in love with you."

SHE dropped her head.
"I—I know."

"And that's why you refused to bring him here earlier," Irwine said. "When you mentioned the gratitude complex this morning I was quite certain. We do not refer to the reaction of gratitude as a complex. It is quite normal and allowable in a robot. Max wouldn't have made such gross over-compensations from any degree of gratitude of which he is capable. Now give me the fuses, please."

"No, doctor! Please don't!" She said it even as she obeyed him, slipping the two little silver-alloy bus-bars from her pocket and holding them out to him.

"I know it's hard for you to accept," Irwine said, "but the most noble emotion in man is the greatest sin in a robot. Man's love can enrich his life and the lives of others immeasurably. A robot's can only ruin his utility, at best. If a human should reciprocate his love, well, that's the type of tragedy it is my duty to prevent."

"I know, I know," she said, "but can't you treat him? Can't you do anything?"

"Think back, Eva, to the only two robots I have executed. Remember my explanation then? It is the same with

Max. The emotion of love is diffused through his whole nervous system. Unlike a man, we cannot find its source and remove the stimulation-response in a robot. It is a fantastic emotion to discover at all in a robot. We do not know where it begins. We only know that Max is corrupted with it. He must be destroyed."

He took the fuses from her trembling palm, reached under the back edge of the console and replaced them. His hand moved to the heavy red switch.

"No, no!" Eva flung herself at her servant and grasped the two deadly electrodes from his ears. Irwine clawed at the red lever to open the circuit again, but the spring-loaded switch took micro-seconds to react.

Eva stiffened, an electrode in each hand. Then she crumpled noiselessly to the floor. Irwine swept around the console and scooped her up in his arms. "You insane little idiot!"

He dropped her on the little-used operating table for human patients and stethoscoped her chest. The brief charge of current had travelled from hand to hand across her body, and her heart fluttered futilely in fibrillation.

Irwine grabbed instruments from the cabinet behind him, slashed the neck of her dress and ripped it to her waist, baring her meager bosom. He cut deeply, almost recklessly, clipped ribs, and raised the vibrating heart in his naked, unsterile hands.

He massaged the trembling organ, fingers wet with slippery blood, and he felt it quiet. Then it surged and pulsed again. A motion caught Irwine's eye. Max, with the ear-electrodes gone, had recovered from the disabling shock. He stood beside the high table staring down at the crimson splotch and the gaping cavity in his mistress's chest.

A second later Irwine would have had a homicidal robot tearing him apart, but the doctor comprehended the problem.

MAX, I need you to save Eva's life," he commanded sharply. "The anesthetic tube, there behind you. Put the mask on her face, quickly! She's beginning to breathe again. If she re-

gains consciousness now the pain-shock will kill her."

Max stood uncertainly for an instant, then he moved to obey. Irwine dictated instructions, meanwhile moving swift fingers to repair the grisly damage he had wrought. Gas hissed into the face mask, and Eva's chest heaved rhythmically.

He moved to the washroom, where he removed his spattered uniform and scrubbed up. His trembling fingers could manage only a crude knot in his tie, and he was unnerved to discover the toll which the unaccustomed human surgery had taken from him.

Moving back to the console, he spoke harshly to Max, who was hovering near Eva's side. "Remove the mask. She'll be all right."

The robot did so with gentle fingers. Then Irwine ordered, "Now pick up those electrodes and put them into your ears."

Max remained motionless, staring down at his mistress. "That's an order, Max! Pick up those electrodes and put them back in your ears!"

The robot turned slowly. "You are going to destroy me. You tried before, and Eva saved me. Isn't that so?"

"It is quite so," Irwine admitted without hesitation. "You have caused your mistress enough pain. Now let's get this over with before she becomes conscious."

"You mean—I caused this?" Max pointed to Eva's bandaged chest.

"Yes, you caused that. Now hurry up! There's no need to expose her to . . ."

Eva groaned softly. Max turned back to her, touched her hair with his fingers for a moment, then stooped and picked up the electrodes. He slipped them into his ears. "I am ready," he said.

Irwine scowled. Eva's head was turned to them, and her eyes fluttered open. The grimace of pain vanished in horror at the tableau before her. "No!" she whispered. "No, doctor! Please!" she sobbed weakly.

Irwine's hand fell away from the switch. He touched the disabling stud instead, and Max went rigid. Irwine crossed to Eva and took a cold hand in

his own. "It's the only way. He's hurt you enough already."

"THEN let me die," she said closing her eyes. "I'm ugly. No one has ever really loved me. Not even you after 30 years—"

"But, I'm past all that, Eva. Don't you understand?"

"Max isn't. He loves me. Don't take him away from me!"

"My dear Eva, even if I didn't think so much of you, I couldn't turn Max loose again. He'll become dangerous. You'd have to keep him locked up."

"I will."

"But he'll break out. They always do. They become more and more jealous of everyone you associate with. Their jealousy becomes a fixation, and sooner or later he'll kill someone."

She clutched his hand and rolled her head from side to side. "I'll take care of him. He won't break out. I promise. Robert, if you have any gratitude for all the years I've been with you, please, please let me take Max home again."

The whisper faded, and the excruciating pain pulled her back into merciful oblivion. Irwine administered a sedative intravenously and then hurled the hypodermic across the room.

He jabbed the phone stud and called the hospital ten floors below his office. "Send up a stretcher team, please," he ordered. "Human patient for convalescence. Post-surgery. No visitors." He paused for a second. "No visitors except her servant, a male robot—name of Max. Let him attend her."

He snatched a form from a drawer, filled out the pertinent information for admitting Eva, made the necessary notation concerning Max, and signed it. In the absence of Eva's signature he was, in effect, making himself responsible for Max's behaviour.

It was unethical, irresponsible, even irrational. Some day an innocent human would pay for this action. The hospital order before him was no less than a death warrant, an undated check payable to Max in the amount of one human life.

And the life, Dr. Robert Irwine knew, would most likely be his own . . . ●●●



The body in the box
was my own . . .

I Like a Happy Ending

By LESLIE WALTHAM

MONDAY, Sept. 3, 2037. . . .
September, the third. Just four months to the day since he left.

God knows, I have done the best I could to be like the rest of them. Those capable, organized war wives. Producing tea sandwiches, and flower arrangements, and conversation, and sometimes babies. Didn't I try? These sixteen rotten weeks?

But for me, it's just a vacuum. Days

filled with the shadows of children I don't have. Lonely meals. Chaste, empty hours. It's almost like a disease of some sort.

And now I'm beginning to have symptoms.

This morning I went out to get the fission pellets. After loading two of them into the house tubes, and putting the last one into my Chevrodone, I took the lead shielding back, and tried to jam

it into the box. Something was in there.

It was a rock. Just a pretty cairngorm rock. Transparent and sun riddled.

The mailcopter shooshed in circles of sound over my head. "Good mornin', Miz Tully."

I tried to look up, but I couldn't. A stiletto of light, imprisoned in the rock, had harpooned out, holding me. A feeling of well-being spilled over me. Waves of it.

And I felt Mike nearby. It was as if he had come up quietly from behind and girdled my waist in his arms. I could even feel the muscles tighten on my ribs, moving. It was the strangest sensation. I wanted to stop right there, and never move again. Never lose that awareness that he was here, with me, home where I want him.

"Good mornin', Miz Tully!"

"*Miz Tully!*" The voice came to me muffled in layers of tissue. I had to wrench myself to answer.

"Oh—I didn't hear you, Mr. Markham."

"Well, I cal'clate you didn't. You sure were concentrated like."

"Yes." He had on his Monday morning smile. "I was . . . I . . ."

"You feel poorly, ma'am?"

"No. . . ." But everything real was so dull. The trees, making that mangy fringe against the sky. "No, I'm just fine."

"You look a mite squeamish. Not so sassy as usual."

I smiled. "It's nothing."

"The way you was standin' there. If I didn't know I ain't let the mail down yet, I reckon you was reading somethin' right interestin'." He looked quizzical. "Nothing give you a start, did it?"

"No, there's no news. I . . . I found a rock." It sounded so silly.

The rotor song washed my words away from him. "You what, ma'am?"

"A rock. A *rock*. I found a *ROCK*."

Something about Mr. Markham's face closed in. "I see," he muttered. "You got one of them things too, huh?"

"One of what things?" He quickened his blades and lifted away from me. Deliberately. The noise fluttered my ears.

"Cain't hear you, Miz Tully."

"I just wanted to know . . . please! *Mr. Markham!*"

The machine disappeared skyward. A giant dragon fly, swooping and dipping and swooping, over the suburban homes.

And I stood there with the sun shining on my letters and my rock.

What did he mean? "One of them things, *too?*"

TUESDAY, the fourth, three A.M. . . .

I just woke up. I know where that rock came from. It belongs to Bobby. Mrs. Steadman told me he's always collecting something or other. Tadpoles, or dead flies, or dismantled robot parts.

It's very likely that the thing belongs to him and he stuck it in the box to tease me.

I must give it back to him in the morning.

At any rate, I'll be glad to get it out of the house. It's down in the viewing room. I don't remember putting it there, but I have an urge to go down and look at it.

Imagine. I'm in my bedroom. Twenty feet away. Separated by almost eighteen inches of plastistone and mentorium and eternomet.

And I can *feel* it there. . . .

SAME day . . . lunch time. . . .

That's funny.

Fifteen minutes ago the front door slammed. Bobby banged in, all dust and hurry.

"I'm in here," I called.

Crash, boom, boom, up the hall ramp. "Ma wants something."

"Over at your house?"

"Nope." He pushed a liquid recipient into my hand. "The coffee tube isn't working, and it's coming through all mixed up with the onion soup. She wants to know if she can borrow some until the circuitman can come, cause they're not working today, and she's going crazy without her morning coffee, and thank you very much."

He clattered at my heels into the kitchen. "How's the milk tube?"

"It's got gin in it, and Ma won't let

me drink any. I hope the circuitman don't ever come."

I laughed, and leaning against the counter top, drew a draught of coffee. "Oh, by the way," I said carefully, "I found something that belongs to you."

"My kite?"

"No, a rock."

I saw him look down at his hands. "A yellow one?"

"Yes." It was a good, *deep* breath.

"Then it *does* belong to you."

"No, it doesn't."

"But you knew it was yel—"

"They all are. But that one's yours. I got mine." He fished one grimy hand into his overjacket and came up with a chip of sun.

I just looked at it for a minute, not saying anything.

"It's like I told you. Yours is yours. We're not supposed to have but one."

"Who isn't?"

"Everybody."

"Everybody *where*?"

"All over."

"On this street? . . . or farther?" He fidgeted one foot over the other, scraping away at the leather. "Do *all* the children have them?"

"Sure. And all the grown-ups too. Only some of them don't know it yet."

"Oh? Why not?"

"Cause. Cause big people don't believe in stuff like that. They tell you stories about Peter Pan and stuff like that, only they're laughing so hard they don't give it a chance to work."

"And that makes them harder to find."

"Sure."

I could hear the egg-beater noise of the school plane as it circled near the Carson house.

"Golly!" he yelled. "I'll be late . . . I gotta get this back to Ma, and. . ."

"Wait!" I called, running after him.

"Just tell me . . . what are they for?" I asked.

"Why, for *wishing*," he answered, staring at me.

He said it as if I had asked him what a piece of cake was for.

"Why, for *eating*," he would have said.

ABOUT two o'clock. . . .

I just called Edna. She has a pre-school youngster. At that age, they ought to be approachable. And she lives in the Mastering section. That gives it plenty of distance.

"Have you gotten yours yet?" I asked.

"Now, honestly, Carrie. You'll have to qualify that remark a bit. My what?"

"Your *rock*."

There was a dead silence at the other end of the artery.

"No, but I know whose head I can find one in. Listen, dear. You've been alone too much. Why don't you whip over and spend the night with us? Tom and I would love to have you."

And I'm going. I'm going to find out about this thing.

It's ridiculous, but I looked at that stone after Bobby left, and I could swear that both of them are as alike as two peas in a pod. Not just made out of the same material, with little differences here and there. But every angle, every plane, every shading of color . . . exactly alike.

They're duplicates.

Exact duplicates.

STILL Tuesday . . . late. . . .

I got here about seven-thirty. Tom met me after I ported the Chevrodrome.

"How're things tying off?" he welcomed me.

"Oh, the knots are tight enough. I hope."

"Like a drink? Well seasoned, or just waved under the nose?"

"No, not tonight, thanks." I waited until Edna came down and then I told them the whole story. They looked at one another and at me just the way I knew they would. They laughed a little, and then a lot, and said sure I could ask Binky about it if I wanted to.

She stood in front of us, a raw five-years-old and shiny with soap.

"Acourse I founded mine. Yesters morning in the washmouth."

"In the mouthwash?"

"Yup. And it works good too. Just like they said it would." She nodded a vigorous testimonial.

"How does it work? Mommie and I don't know."

"Oh, just neat. You look in it and want after something, and what you want after comes."

"You mean it materializes?"

"Hummm?"

"Does the thing you 'want after' become solid . . . real . . . in your hands?"

She puzzled for a moment. "Nope. I don't think so. Cause yesters when I wanted after that doll, it comed. And now it's went."

Tom leaned forward suddenly. "Was that when you were in the yard? When I had to go out and bounce you one to get you to answer?"

"Yup."

Tom's eyes rimed Edna over the child's head.

"Oh, hang on to your liver," she said. "This is kid stuff."

"Yes? Well you should have had a look at her. Standing like a statue while I yelled. I had to come down from the second tier, and she still hadn't moved."

Edna pulled Binky's flushed attention on to her lap: "Look, Sweetie, Daddy and I won't be mad if you and the kids are playing a joke on us. We just want the truth."

"Oh yes!" She approved heartily.

"Somebody—maybe Julie or Meg—is giving these rocks around, and you're making believe with them. That's it, isn't it?"

"Hummm?" She wriggled to her feet.

"Pay attention. The kids are doing this, aren't they?"

"Nooooo."

"Then why don't big people have them?"

"They do, but they don't see things so good." Edging for escape.

"Does the nursery school teacher have one?"

"Yup."

"And your dancing instructor?"

"Yup, and the president, and Hoppaplane O'Leary—" she bounced on the elevation ramp, and it carried her off, pointing one fat finger—"and you . . . and you . . . and you."

Her belt trailed pinkly behind her, leaving silence in its wake.

Edna cleared her throat and recrossed her legs.

"They could have gotten them from a rockpile somewhere."

"Some rockpile," said Tom.

"But it doesn't make sense," she protested.

"Why does everything always have to make sense? Just suppose . . . just figure it!" His face was the color of concrete.

"All right. Go ahead."

He leaned his elbows on his knees and ticked off the items. "Carrie would have Mike home with her. You'd have your new entertainment room. Old Wellbourne would talk to his dead daughter. Mrs. Davis would go to the tropics. Father Shiffron would build his church. Mr. Crowner wouldn't be deaf . . ."

Edna laughed. "And where would the psychiatrists be? No more frustrations! Every fantasy come true! Is that bad?"

"But what if it caught you?"

"Caught you?"

"Yes. People are the way they are . . . they keep trying because they have something to reach for. If they get it too soon, what's to keep them from just sitting down, and . . . no, it's too easy."

She laughed again. Tom didn't.

"Daddy!" The speaking tube spluttered.

"Binky, I thought you were in bed."

"Yup, I know. But Daddy. . ."

"What?"

"I wanna tell you. Mommie's in in the drier chute in the basement, and yours is in the airboat. Goonite!" Click. Click.

What we talked about after that I don't remember. I do know that Edna excused herself to do something in the kitchen. If she hadn't stumbled on the ramp, I wouldn't have realized she was going down into the basement.

Tom was so busy getting my kit into the guest room he didn't hear it.

"Bury me sitting up, pet," he said as he left me. "I'm always at a disadvantage when I'm on my back."

I watched him as he went straight from the house to the little hangar they

have in the yard. I could see his flash making fans of light back and forth. Then it stopped about waist high and focused on something in his hand.

He didn't move a muscle until the dog from next door started barking and pulling at his trouser leg.

I timed him. It was well over twelve minutes.

I'm getting frightened. . . .

WEDNESDAY, the fifth. . . .

I got back quite early.

Everything is going wrong with the house. The pellets weren't delivered this morning. I pushed the "egg" lever and the "toast" lever and they just popped up again. Neither did the mail come. I waited outside for Mr. Markham for an hour, but he never showed up.

It's a beautiful day . . . the sun runs down the buildings like melted butter—but there are no children about. Just one, up on the corner, where there are usually about a dozen.

I waited until noon for the house to adjust, and then I called up.

"Necessity Service?"

"Yes?" a tired voice answered.

"This is Tully, 314W36. The food dispensers don't seem to be delivering."

"Oh yes. I'm sorry, but the rigger from your section isn't in today."

"Couldn't you put another one on it? I'm going to need some things soon."

"I'm sorry, but the riggers are not in."

"All of them?"

"Well, quite a few. We're really very rushed. About one third of the men are out, and we're doing the best we can. I have you on the list and we'll get to you as soon as possible."

"Thank you."

I looped in for another number. It was a business number, but no one answered at all. I looped in a third time.

"Power Dispensary."

"Do you take care of the Z-Y zone?"

"Yes. May I help you?"

"It's about my energy allotment."

"It hasn't been delivered." She didn't even ask. "How many days behind are you?"

"Why . . . just today."

"Oh. Well, you'll have to be patient. We are tracing through on deficiencies now." She sounded about to hang up.

"Just a minute," I said. "Why are your deliveries late?"

"We have a great many of our employees on the sick list at this time."

"Oh, I see. Could you . . . could you tell me what percentage?"

"Really, madam, I have other lines ringing. I suggest you get in touch with Personnel. . . ." And the line went dead.

I looked at the floor for a few moments, and then I tried to get in touch with the Master of Personnel.

He's out sick.

I hope he *is* sick. Oh, how I hope he *is* sick."

THURSDAY, September sixth. . . .

The food gave out this morning, and I had to go in to town. It looks like it does on a holiday. Almost deserted, with just the glare coming down the center of the street at you. And sun all over. Sun on sun, all down the sun-drenched walls.

There was one woman in the store. She was staring red and purple at the same time.

"I'm *not* complaining! But you just said you haven't seen the loading rocket for *two days*." Her face looked very familiar to me.

"That's beyond my control, madam."

"I know, I know, but *why* haven't you seen it?"

"The men must be out on strike."

"No, they're not! It's the same all over . . . !"

"That's right," I couldn't help it. "I tried yesterday. . . ."

"You see! You *see*!" I could have sworn I knew her from someplace. "Don't you see what's happening?"

I felt something inside of me shut itself up. I didn't want to hear it.

"I'm sorry. . . ."

"Don't be like the rest of them. Why can't we talk about it? What's holding us back?"

She shouldn't have said it. I tried to pull away.

"They're slipping away by the hundreds. People are sitting in their houses and smiling at pieces of rock! Please, *talk to me.*"

My flesh crawled and I started toward the street.

"Wait!" she cried. "For the love of heaven! If it hasn't started to pull you yet, get help, *quick*. They don't try to keep going any more. There's three on our block already—they couldn't be roused. And there are fewer of us left to do the rousing!"

Part of me leaned out to her, but the thing in me that wanted Mike held me back. We were outside now.

"I begged you. Remember—I begged you! And when you're begging someone else, you won't be alone." She looked helplessly in vacant circles at the vacant lanes, her eyes forged in hysteria. "I can't *stand* this any longer!"

She fell apart all of a sudden. Her words rose to a half scream, and she raced past me. At the corner, a lonely congestion officer stood, directing nothing in particular.

"Put me in jail," she shrieked into his astonished face. "Lock me up so I can't get to it. . . ."

"No, *wait!*" I called to her.

"There's no time to wait. . . ." Her disintegrator lanced into the staring windows of the buildings. One, two, six, ten . . . fragments of glass showered from gaping wounds. "Lock me up. *Lock me up!*"

She stopped as suddenly as she started, and looked at the man, waiting.

He stirred himself as if waking from a dream.

Arms reached toward him, wrists together, palms upward, asking for the handcuffs.

"Please?" she said in a child's voice.

"Come on," he murmured gently as he led her away.

MID-MORNING. . . .

When I came home, I put the rock into the safe. I closed my eyes and reset the numbers on the combination. I can't open it now.

Then I came upramp and stood looking at myself in the reflector. Do you

know why that woman looked so familiar? I have the same horror on my face that she had on hers.

I'm terrified. . . .

Late afternoon. . . .

The television shots are getting spotty. Some of them come through and some of them don't. Of the news commentators, only Dudley Jamison is left. He said that fighting on the fronts has come to a virtual halt.

Before he signed off, he dropped his notes and looked straight into the camera. He looked tired. Awfully tired. Then, when he usually says "Good afternoon," he said something else.

I won't tune in on that channel tomorrow. He won't be there.

Night. . . .

The audio signaled this evening. It has been over three days since the last signal, and I could hardly control my hands.

"Yes."

"Mrs. Michael Tully?"

"Yes." My spine was a frozen neck-lace.

"India calling. Will you hold on please?" The lines sparked and spluttered endlessly.

"Mike?" I asked the spluttering.

And then his voice came through.

"Carrie? Carrie, is that really you?"

"Yes, darling, yes! Oh, I'm so glad!"

"I had to call. I was afraid I wouldn't reach you."

"I'm all right," I said unnecessarily.

He hesitated for a long moment. "Is it *there* too?"

"Yes."

"Bad?"

"I think so. I'm afraid to really look. What about with you?"

"Oh God, Carrie!" His voice broke.

"There isn't anybody left any more."

"Darling. . . ."

"We're the first, out here. Away from home. Wanting things so badly. It was easy for most of them." He stopped suddenly.

"Tell me."

"Make sure first. It isn't pretty."

"It's all right."

He drew a breath. "They were in our packs. All at the same time. We

just put in our hands and took out the supplies and the rocks. As simple as that."

"I know."

"That was on Monday. Just after we got through mangling and bombing and killing and dying . . . God . . . men who hadn't had a cigarette in a week, smoked them by the dozen. Men whose stomachs were blasted all over the ground were eating seven course dinners. Do you understand, Carrie? Do you see?"

"What do you want me to see?"

"That it's so easy . . . what's the use of standing here popping a little fission piston at those mountains of hell? Why should we pull ourselves through mud and filth with our insides trailing out like the slime out of a snail?"

"Mike, don't put yourself in it . . . don't!"

"I've got to. You don't look into wrecked cellars for disembowled churchmen, or walk through a lovely field to stumble over a mangled foetus, and not be touched by it. Try, Carrie, try! A man can get only just so tired."

"But this isn't the way. . . ."

He laughed a little. "Try telling that to some of the men. They have everything they want now. Liquor, food, women—"

"Oh no!"

"Oh yes. You should see them. They sit with their stones in their hands—the ones that are still whole, that is—and they grin. Some with big chested blondes. . . ."

"Mike stop!"

He must have realized what he was doing.

"I'm sorry, Carrie. But I had to let you know. . . ."

I could feel him trying to gather himself together. "Carrie, I've loved you so much. And we've had so many beautiful things together. Haven't we?"

"The most beautiful that could have been. You know it's the same with me."

"Yes, but I wanted to hear you say it. Funny, how you reach for the words, so you can hold them. . . ."

The lines started to gibber.

"I love you, Mike. I love you. I love you . . . hold them close." It got worse.

I could hardly hear him.

"Maybe—maybe I'll call again in a couple of nights. But if I don't, I—well, I want you to know that—"

"Yes, Mike?"

"That it will be with you, Carrie. It will be with you."

"Thank you, darling," I said, and then the line went dead.

FRIDAY, September seventh. . . .

I fell asleep in the library last night. Sitting next to the audio.

I dreamed I was sitting on something large and oblong, in the middle of a twilight beach. It didn't seem to have any hinges, but there was a small crack around the edge just big enough for me to get my fingernails into. Suddenly, I knew there was something inside that was very precious to me. I had to get it out. I worked at it with all my strength, and after a long while, the lid came loose. It was almost pitch dark, and I had to lean close to see.

There was a body in the box.

It was me.

As I looked, a light came, suffused the face. Then . . . the eyes stayed closed, but the lips opened in a wide grin.

My own scream woke me up. I was standing in front of the safe, tearing at the lock like a wild thing. There was blood all over my hands.

My God, my God, what is happening?

Eleven o'clock. . . .

I've got to do something definite. Something besides sitting here and letting that thing pull me.

A few hours ago, I went down the street house by house. Directly across, I couldn't get in. I went to the window and old Mr. Lieber was there. He was sitting in his chair with the newspaper forgotten at his feet. His head was leaning back as if he were resting, but he held something in front of him. I rapped on the pane several times, but he didn't answer.

The Rockwood house is completely empty. The doors are open, and you can walk through the entire place, but there is no one home. Just the curtains,

spinning on the September breeze.

The Marchands are sitting in a chilled circle on the terrace, smiling. They look as if they're playing a game.

Then I decided to fly over to Tom's and Edna's.

All the shutters are down on their house. It is like walking undersea when you go in the front hall. It gives you the feeling you are trespassing on something that is complete and perfect—that shouldn't be disturbed.

They're all in the living room . . . Binky on Edna's lap.

"Tom," I said. I put my hand on his shoulder.

"Tom. *Tom!* TOM!" My voice came back to me, shaky, quavering.

Tom started to lean to one side. Then he slid gently, gently, softly, softly from the couch, buoyed up by the green air of the room. A piece of yellow crystal rolled from his hand and lay between my feet.

I found myself running toward the daylight. The sun was warm, but it couldn't warm me any more.

I remember what you said, Tom. "Bury me sitting up. . . ." But I can't go back to you. I can't!

Forgive me, Tom. . . .

One-thirty. . . .

That woman. That woman in the jail.

I just called there and got no answer. They've left her there alone.

I'm going down and let her out. . . .

SIX o'clock. . . .

She didn't want me to.

She was sitting in a cell all by herself. Just an empty building with long steel corridors, the bars flying in silver repetition, smaller and smaller, into a jealous spider web. And in the center, a solitary woman, sitting, looking at the floor.

She raised her head at my sounds. "Go back," she called.

"I can't." The release tools jingled in my hand.

"Go back!" she cried. "I don't want you to."

"How can you know?" My steps brought me closer.

"I don't want to die that way. I want

to know what's happening to me. Don't take my mind away—"

The words hit hard. Bullets from a gun, they ripped into my stomach.

"I can't leave you here knowing you can't get out. It's the same as murdering you."

"No . . . you don't understand!" She was standing at the bars, holding them close, clinging with a desperation you might see in a mother with a dead child. "Let me be. Turn around and go back."

I looked for the liberation mechanism and tried the contact knobs. Her voice hammered at my back.

"*Let me alone.* I want to stay here. This is the only way I can keep what I am. The rest of them are all *erased.* . . ."

"You'll die there."

"I'll die anyway. And the other way isn't decent. With your eyes seeing something that shouldn't be seen. . . ."

Secret gears sprang to life.

"Let it *stay locked!*"

And the grating slid away with a whirling sound.

She covered her face in her hands, and sank to the floor. "No, no, no. . . ." I heard her moan as I turned to go.

And she wouldn't leave. All the way down that steel corridor, I turned back, her figure tinier and more huddled each time. Not moving.

"Wait," she called as I reached the door. I waited.

"I *hate* you! You took my prayers away from me!"

I ran until my legs twisted and threw me on the ground. I've never run like that before in my life.

That night. . . .

The audio didn't signal. Mike didn't call.

I tried three times to get the operator, but the artery doesn't get through. There is no one there to receive it. I waited until dawn.

Dawn, did I say? That used to be a lovely word.

Oh Mike . . . Mike . . . Mike. . . .

SEPTEMBER eight—the *sixth* day. . . .

I planed into New York today.

The little airboat flew as if it knew.

Proudly, over the desolate, shining land. Keep your head high, Carrie, it seemed to say.

The altitude lanes blinked their lights at me. Proceed. Caution. Tread atmosphere. Directing ghosts.

I was the only one. And I'm almost a ghost now too.

New York is perfect. An unscarred miraculous corpse. The strains of Stravinsky still float over the pavilion at Televue Square. Electronic eyes still open and close doors for forgotten images. A mechanical heart still keeps it flowering—squandering its metal-and-stone beauty for the touch of a nevermore hand.

It tries. So hard. For no one.

I cruised from the Bronx to the Island. From Brooklyn to Riverdale. No one.

No one! It's just not possible.

Do you know what you do when you are the last woman, with a city at your feet? Crazy things! Silly things you know are wrong, but you keep on doing them because the want of a warm sound blinds you, and you can't think.

I went from one store to another, trying on mink coats. The ones I didn't want, I threw into the disposal grinders. One of them, a silverblue greatcoat that almost dragged the floor, had a price tag on it. Twenty-three thousand dollars, and I walked out of the store wearing it.

No one stopped me. A week ago . . . never mind, that was a week ago.

I walked over to Tiffany's and looked in the window. Diamonds. My hands ran along the velvet cushions cuddling the gems, pools of them. I took them outside and let them rain through my fingers onto the sidewalk. They lay like blazing eyes, winking at me in the sun.

Suddenly I thought of all the women who are holding things like that in their hands, forfeiting their lives for a fragment of light. And I started to laugh.

"What are you doing?" a voice asked.

At first I thought it was my mind playing tricks.

"What are you doing?" it asked again.

He must have been watching me.

Standing quietly, wondering, and watching me.

"Nothing," I stammered. "I mean . . . nothing."

He smiled as the blood rose slowly in my cheeks.

"What a luxury for me," he said. "A blush of embarrassment at a time like this. What a wonderful thing."

AND I started to cry. All the tears that hadn't fallen, the ones of fear, the ones of anger, the ones of grief, came loose, and were free. I don't know how long he soothed me or how far we walked, but his fingers were gentle as thistledown.

He tilted my head up, and memorized my face. "What do they call the girl with the brown hair and the red-blue eyes?"

"Carrie."

"And why are you still here, Carrie?"

"It's in the safe and the combination is changed. I can't get to it."

"You have your disintegrator," he suggested.

"The charges are all gone. They don't deliver any more, you know."

"Oh." He stroked my cheek absently.

"Where's yours?"

"I have it here." He took a small yellow fire from his pocket.

"And you haven't used it?"

"I will. It's only a matter of time."

"But when?"

"Who knows what instant of what hour a thought will begin to be born. With me it's a little different. I never wanted much that I didn't have."

"You were rich?"

"The opposite. I was a 'uranium bum.'"

"You?"

He nodded.

"But then . . . *anything* would be better than what you had."

"No. That's where you are wrong. I've always just watched. The big ones . . . clawing for power and position. The lower ones . . . reaching for the next rung up. Everyone jamming his feet into the face of the one he was climbing on. No, I never wanted any-

thing better than what I had."

I didn't answer.

"That's what stopped them. That's why it's taking me longer. I never coveted. I was just satisfied."

"My eyes started to fill again, and he handed me a handkerchief. "Don't now, don't. It's actually not so bad."

"Oh, how can you say that?"

"Because it's true. How could it have been done with more mercy? This is a miracle of magnificence—"

"I don't think so."

"I do. And you should, too. All of them—to have it over so easily. No dark violence. No gut ripping. Just the fulfillment of every desire. And peace. With loved ones together. Orderly as an index." He looked up the sunswept street and nodded his head.

"But they're all dying. It's the end of the world."

He looked at me. "It had to come sometime."

"I don't care. I won't have it. It's horrible."

"What do you want, Carrie? To go down lashed to the mast with the band playing "Nearer My God To Thee?"

"No, no! But I think I'd like to understand."

"Let me tell you a fairy tale."

"A what?"

"A fairy tale." He stopped walking and faced me. "About a boy and a ball. Once upon a time, a little boy had a lovely, round ball. It was shining bright with newness. And the boy took his chalk and drew pictures upon the ball—pictures of all the things he knew about, and sang about, and thought about. And with each picture he drew, the ball grew in beauty."

"Then, one day, the pictures started to overlap one another, and the lines got tangled together and they weren't so clear any more. And finally it got so that no image of beauty could be seen. There were only angry scrawls, saying nothing."

"Now the little boy was a kind-hearted little boy who loved his ball very much, and he didn't want to destroy it. So instead of throwing it away, he left it in a gentle night rain. For he knew that

in the morning it would be clean and shining bright, so that some day, maybe a long, long time from now, it might be written on again."

I waited a long time before I spoke. "Is that a fairy tale?—or a parable?"

"I don't know."

"Don't you think he could have left the scrawls there? He could have forgotten the ball."

"No. They were ugly scrawls."

"I guess so," I said, starting to go. "I guess they were."

Then a thought crept into my head. The mink coat fell from my shoulders, as a light breeze lifted my hair.

"Would you . . . would you like to come home with me?"

"I don't know what you mean." His eyes were surprised.

"Please—it's hard to say. But you said that some day the ball might be written on again. There'll have to be—chalk."

His face misted in pity. "Oh, Carrie! You poor, valiant, confused little Carrie!"

He came to me, standing close. "That was the nicest present I've ever received. Thank you, Carrie, with all my heart."

He never took his eyes from mine, but placed something in the palm of my hand and closed my fingers around it. "It's all I have to give." Taking my face in his hands, he kissed me on both cheeks.

"Good-by, my dear."

He walked swiftly across the street and disappeared around a building, his cloak flapping like giant wings.

I looked down at what I held in my hand.

It was one charge for my disintegrator. . . .

THE Seventh Day. . . .

No, I'm not running any more. There is a point beyond which you don't even try. You slow down and let the thing catch up gradually from behind. You rest.

I've put everything in its place. "Have your house in order," my mother told me. "So that you may open the door wide and say 'Come in.'" The

beds are made. The kitchen is spotless. There are flowers in all the holders.

"Come in," I'll say. "Come in."

It's really a beautiful room . . . this room. A place where everything loves me and holds some thought that I have given it in the past. A pipe that Mike smoked. A bronze plaque we discovered on our honeymoon. They have held the thoughts for me, in safe keeping, and are giving them back to me now . . . when I need them.

I looked into the old Bible just now. There is something in Genesis that caught my eye. In Chapter Eight. Verses Twenty-one and Twenty-two:

"And the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again *smile* any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

Poor Von Weisacker. Poor Von Bethe. With their theory of the transmutation of elements. No nova will burn us. No funeral pyre of hydrogen-

to-helium, helium-to-what . . . ? They worked so hard to damn us in a flaming crematory of dying worlds. And it is all so simple. So gentle. In a daydream. A sigh. A whisper.

We had only to read a book if we had wanted to know.

Yes, the earth will go on. It will revolve around the sun on its six-hundred-million-mile orbit. It will make one precession cone every twenty-six-thousand years. And the skeletons will sit in the houses, and on the streets, and in the gardens, and they'll smile and smile, and smile. The spring suns will try to warm their bones. The Christmas sky will snow its snow on their shining skulls.

But it won't matter.

Because we'll just smile, and smile, and *smile*.

I don't even mind too terribly any more. It would have been ninety-two-million miles into the sun, but it's only two and a half inches to the heart.

I only wish one thing. That Mike could have been here to hold my hand.

But then, he *will* be, won't he?

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from Page 8)

men, physically and emotionally. Society allows them a greater expression of emotion. So, less ulcers, fewer repressions, etc. Also, and more significantly, more male infants die, and male children suffer more from the common childhood illnesses.

How many heads do you *really* have?—626 Higbee, Burlington, Iowa.

Aging turkey gobbler? We thought it one of the best covers ever slapped on a science fiction magazine. And don't anyone dare suggest that we might possibly be prejudiced. Diane, we very seriously doubt that you have had more contact with women than Bryce Walton. Shall we proceed to prove it by deduction? All right, we shall. First, you state that you may have to turn to something "as low and vile as *studying*." This indicates that you are probably in high school, which in turn indicates that you are probably between the ages of fifteen and seventeen. Right? Right.

Now, Bryce Walton is an aged thing, somewhere in the dismal thirties. He has lived in California, New York, and points between. He can consume six martinis without losing his equilibrium, even when they are Yulsman Martinis—a Manhattan variety consisting of gin with a dash of vermouth; just a *dash*! He talks very little of his love-life—a sure sign of dark doings. So even if you turn out to be a college freshman, you can't possibly have had more contact with women than Walton. But honey, you might very well be able to teach Walton, ye olde editorial board, and that scientist named after a bottle of booze, all about *men*! (As for heads, we have one—count it—one.)

NOT TO BE PRINTED

by L. Kay

Dear Editor: In reply to your request to hear

from non-letter-writers as to how they feel about the ego-boobs who write to get their names in print, here is my first (and probably last) letter to an editor.

This letter is merely to be counted, not to be printed.

Several years ago I joined the now defunct Cleveland Science Fiction Society. There was a great excitement every time a member had his name printed in the letter column of any SF mag. In fact, the only thing read in the letter columns by a lot of the members was the names of the letter writers.

Perhaps it is necessary for certain types of people to have this outlet for their publicity-seeking souls.

I read the letter columns occasionally to see what, if any, good ideas other readers have. But I wouldn't miss them if they were left out and the space used for another good story.

On the other hand, a column of readers' ideas (omitting the letters, or parts of letters, in which stories from back issues are rated) might be a thought-provoking addition to a mag.

Well, you wanted us to move out of the shadows, so now that I've done my bit I'll go back into the shadows and continue to enjoy reading science fiction—with my pen dry, my mouth shut, serene in the knowledge that my name will not appear in print.—579 East 230 St., Euclid, Ohio.

Fooled you, didn't we, Kay? Put you in print anyhow. But now that we think it over, we wonder if we really did fool you. We wonder if you didn't figure this to be the strategic time to break into the letter column with a letter denouncing letter writers. Aha! Maybe we've been had!

BOY-OH-BOY-OH-BOY!

by Maston E. James

Dear Editor: The summer issue of the new *Starling Stories* contains something which seems to defy description. It's like a new movement, or a sort of renaissance in which SF as a short-story art form has been given a new type of life. The stories in this edition have used science and art to show the conflict that goes on within the heart. I have never before realized the pathos, in the purest tradition of Greek tragedy, that could surround a mechanical device.

There was Z2963, the edmic computer, who for the simple sake of being recognized for what he was, went down with his friend, K273, the Moonhope 5. Terrific! Then the house, a more loyal or loving friend I could never hope to have. But when I met Alice in Bryce Walton's little masterpiece "Awakening," I knew that I had met a character whom I could never forget. Intense loneliness, shaping an intense personality, which truly became a thing of intense beauty. I am going to keep my eye on Bryce Walton, for he is going to be one of literature's most important names. "An Apple For the Teacher," by

[Turn page]

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Robert F. Young was, in its poignancy, like the poetic works of E. E. Cummings.

This issue was a message which sang of the humanities, and of the future of the humanities.
—719 Belmont Place, Seattle 2, Wash.

Bryce Walton thanks you, the editor thanks you, the editor's mother thanks you, the editor's wife thanks you, the editor's daughter thanks you, the editor's bartender thanks you, the editor's loan company thanks you, the editor's girl-friend—Oops!

STRICTLY FANNISH

by J. Martin Graetz

Dear Editor: Here I am again. Maybe you don't know me. I haven't written a letter since SaMines was defected. I got three reasons for writing, tho. One is that I am soon coming out from behind the curtain of the fringe-fan. Second is that I have some comments about the magazine.

I've been waiting out the change in SS for this last year or so, to see how things would jell. I can't say I'm too displeased. For one thing, your short stories are quite good. Reminds me of the Merwin days when SS had seven or eight shorts per issue, with most of them pretty top material.

This was pretty good on shorts. None really bad, none really outstanding. "Angry House" was about the best.

"Apple for the Teacher" was competent, but I must say that "Awakening" was too gooe. Not only because of the soupy pseudoSturgeon writing, but the reasoning was thick, too. I know there wasn't supposed to be any reasoning, but I still didn't like the story. Haven't read "White Spot."

Glad to see that James Gunn is continuing the Hedonist series. I rather enjoy this future melodrama.

TEV. I hate to see an editor take such a definite open stand against certain types of stories. Seems to me a good editor should accept a well-written, good story, even if it's gloomy, doomy, or what. Granted there's a lot of pessimism, still every now and then a really top tale can make something of it. I have yet to see someone make (to my mind) a really great study in futility. Of course, something like that might lead the author to believe in his own words. Possibly that's why it ain't been did.

A hack or two at the hacks:.

Hoskins: A real top mag has to have a nearly autocratic editor at the helm, like Campbell, Merwin, or Boucher. At the present time (correct me if I'm wrong) the Pines boys haven't got one. (I get this from Fantasy-Times.) I hope along with Bob that the editorial seat jells again in the near future.

Perslon: Who's plotting against whom? I see that you have spelled three out of three lady author's names incorrectly. Me, I'm a hater. With reservations.

Mussells and Butcher: Gee, nothing to grab here.

Frazier: Be careful with that penname stuff. Not so long ago SFdom was set on its ear when a fan decided that the final truth was that Kuttner was Jack Vance. Now we have a whole slew of folks claiming other folks don't exist. Among the victims: John Courtois (It's his sister who's the figment—I think), Linda Perry, Wayne Strickland, and Dave Mason.

Harmon: Glad to see you again, Jim. Last I heard from you, you hadn't answered a letter of mine. I agree (Ed please note) that HoF should come back. Somehow, the HoF stories were better than the ones reprinted in FSM.

I guess that's it. Oh, one other thing. That cover. It's the second time Mr. Emshwiller has done that cover for you, the first one being much, much better. 'Twas in August, 1952.

Bye now. Please improve? SS is fifth on my list of Magazines right now—307 South 52nd St., Omaha, Nebraska.

Your letter was mis-addressed, Marty, but got to me finally. As for my not being autocratic, just ask the senior editor, Alex Samalman. I'm *anonymous*, not colorless! And about that cover—Emshwiller did do another cover with a woman and skeletons in August, 1952, but that's where the resemblance ends. However, another reader seems to think the similarity is strong.

LONG MEMORY

by Allan R. Bens

Dear Editor: It has been months since I have enjoyed a science fiction mag as much as I enjoyed the Summer STARTLING. Ever since Sam quit I have had little interest in your SF mags, but your quality certainly is improving, even to the point where I enjoy SS as much as I used to about three years ago.

The cover painting reminded me of one I remember seeing on TWS for August, 1952. It was painted by Emsh, if I remember rightly. That cover was one of the best I have ever seen on any science fiction magazine since I started reading SF. The first thing you saw when you looked at that cover was a girl staring at something in front of her. You followed her gaze down to where two or three bleached skeletons lay on the ground. From there your gaze went to the spaceship, and from there to two space-suited figures, and from there to the girl again. I remember looking at that cover for a long time, but unfortunately I can't find it in my back issues.

The current cover failed to come off, probably because of the red borders on the top and bottom. It's the same type cover, all right, but somehow it just hasn't got the atmosphere that the old one had.

I enjoyed the letters.

Jim Harmon: I like to pride myself by saying that if a mag isn't good enough to stay alive with-

out the help of every reader buying two copies it would be just as well if it withered away and died. But yes, Jim, darned if I don't get sentimental when it comes to the question of the new 3 in 1 SS. Things look pretty grim right now. From one monthly, two bimonthlies and an annual—down to one quarterly with a 32 page cut.

As to your question, ed., of some readers resenting fan domination in the letter columns, I say this: Print the most interesting letters. Simple as that. No matter who writes them. Let's not have TEV degenerating into something like this: "Dear Editor: I like your mag. The stories are terrific. I liked them all this issue. The cover was nice. So were the illos. Keep up the good work. Yours truly—" etc.

You know, I'm rather glad that Manning Draco did wither away and die, he got rather tiresome around the seventh or eighth story.

When are you going to revive TWS? (OK, OK, I just asked.) If the quality of the stories gets even higher than it was this issue we should have a bimonthly SS and a bimonthly TWS in a year's time.

Will somebody please tell me what the HALL OF FAME was?—Box 848, Bigger, Sask, Canada.

Again let me state that the only thing the two covers had in common was a girl and skeletons. The color schemes were different, the backgrounds were different, the impression given by the covers different. So there! And leave Jim Harmon alone, hear? If he wants to buy two copies of STARTLING STORIES, let him! And if he wants everyone else to buy two copies of the mag, let him go on wanting. We like the whole idea. Sure, we do. Just think—if we doubled our circulation by next issue, we could go monthly, print more stories, make more money, et cetera!

As for The Hall of Fame, it was a reprint department—we'd pick a story from one of our old magazines, a story eight or ten or more years old that we felt the fans of today would enjoy, and we'd run it in Startling. However, we felt that most readers wanted all new material, and so we dropped reprints.

FANS GET THE BUSINESS

by Jeanne Gumm

Dear Editor: Here's a blast you invited from a "heretofore unheard-from reader." As a newcomer to the field of SF (about two years) I would like to state that the so called SF Fans make me sick. Their cute sayings and coy writing-styles seem to me obvious attempts to get into print—not sincere criticisms of anything.

And what's more, I think they do you SF

[Turn page]

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publishers a disservice if you're really trying to expand your readership. My reaction to their carrying-ons via the letter departments of SF mags is probably typical of us ordinary people who like SF because it's entertaining, stimulating, and representative of some of the best creative writing being done today. Said reaction is this—they make me feel like a greenhorn who is out of step with things because I haven't read SF since its dawning days. They make me ashamed to say I enjoy reading the same stuff they get so hopped-up about that they make a *career* out of reading it!

My advice, if you want to get more readers, is use the space devoted to these fannish, clannish cliques to print another of your fine short stories: My motto: "You can read SF and still be normal."

Here's to more issues like your summer SS, with the same high standard of stories, terrific illustrations (you really deserve congrats on those), and less chit-chat from the long hairs of SF. You don't have to cater to these characters to get readers—lots of us ordinary business people will continue to buy (not *collect*) your issues—and we pay you the compliment of thinking you, as an SF editor, know what should be in print and what shouldn't.

Incidentally, I'd appreciate your printing the editor's name somewhere in your issue. As a newcomer in this field, I don't know these details off hand, and it would be a little assurance that you don't have to be a career SF reader to pick up a mag like SS and enjoy it.

Thanks again for many hours of delightful reading, and best wishes from a normal type SF reader, not a fan.—30 North La Salle St.

We're glad you like the magazine, but you'll have to hop on the soap-box and whip up a little enthusiasm among friends and acquaintances before we can get back to monthly status. And when I say "you," I mean all of you. Got it?

SHORT AND SWEET?

by Rich Santelli

Dear Editor: Just finished *An Apple for the Teacher* in the summer ish; didn't think it quite up to par. The thing that irked me the most was the way the alien psychologist—who had supposedly taken great pains to hide his true identity—went right ahead and practically spelled out the fact that he was an alien by the use of non-terrestrial stationery. Seems to me that the story would have been more enjoyable if some more subtle device had been used to reveal his identity.

Ah well, there will always be a few hard-to-please grouches in the crowd.

White Spot was good, the remainder fair to lousy.

I think that letters concerned with religion and morals, pro or con, should be dropped from TEV since they only create bad feeling and don't make for interesting reading anyway.

Here's hoping that SS never folds and always keeps it pulp size—35255 53 Avenue, Cicero, Ill.

Thanks for the compliments; ugh! for the insults; and amen to your last line—the part about never folding, that is.

WOMAN OF WALWORTH

by Connie Davey

Dear Editor: I have just finished the magazine called Thrilling Wonder Stories, and have been reading some of the letters sent to your fan column. I am writing to ask if you could help me in any way to get some American pen friends, as a friend of mine wrote to you some time ago and has since had quite a number of pen friends.—87 Bayson Rd., Walworth, London S₆ E. 17, England.

ANOTHER ENGLISH LASS

by Doris Trowers

Dear Editor: After reading your article in Thrilling Wonder Stories, I would very much like a male pen friend in America.—185 Tyers Street, Vauxhall S.E. 11, London, England.

If any readers are wondering about the ages of Miss Davey and Miss Trowers, they are 23 and 20, respectively. Ah me, SS is branching into the lovelorn division!

MORE FROM OUR MAIL

Barbara Chandler writes to thank us for digging up back copies of Gunther's articles. No more left now. Reader signing himself Sar Castic throws bitter irony in the direction of those who would treat juvenile delinquents with kid gloves. Irvin L. Norfleet, Jr., agrees with Jim Harmon's letter in the summer S.S. "in every way." Also throws in his vote for revival of Hall of Fame. Ron Ellik says Miss Cathy Harlan encouraged him to come out of retirement and back to TEV. Now why'd she go and do that for? Ron votes for revival of Hall of Fame.

Des Emery writes our previous editor a very personal letter, then branches into the (yawn) religion vs. science blather, then blasts us for shortening the letter column, then votes for Hall of Fame, then tells a joke, and finally promises to mail us a story. Gertrude Wills thinks she's the only actual living true-to-life science fiction fan around. She's never met another, and wonders if we create our letter writers right here in the office. Now, after reading her own, she can wonder if we made *her* up. (Now there's a psychological theme for some talented writer!) Paul J. Robbins

says he has "2,000 mags., scattered pbs and hard-cover books to sell." But we think he should send them to the Harvard University Library collection, that's what we think.

Larry B. Farsace writes us that his mag, Golden Atom, is ready to roll. We'll be looking forward to our copy. Warren F. Link writes three pages, but we can't make it out. Must be Martian semantics. Bob Farnham asks us to make an announcement that runs against company policy. Sorry, Bob, but we can mention that the second Southeastern Science Fiction Conference "is to be held in Charlotte, N.C., sometime around March, 1956." A stamped self-addressed envelope to Bob at 20 Mountain View Drive, Dalton, Georgia, will bring full details. Rita Yulsman, an old friend of science fiction and the editor, is expecting an addition to the family. A baby, we hope.

Richard Jantelli says that in a recent letter he suggested we combine all three of our mags into one, but, and we quote—"darn you, I meant that the new mag should have three times the volume!" Sure—and we'd have to charge three times the normal quarter. Can you see how everyone would flock to the newsstands to buy a science fiction mag for *seventy-five cents*?

Mara Mac Culloch breaks 29 years of silent fandom to come out against religion. Should have broken your silence a year earlier, Mara, because we've exhausted the religious issue (at least in this magazine). Ken Kurtis writes us two letters—one on the spring Startling; one on the summer issue. In general, he liked both very much. H. Maxwell writes a long, but extremely intelligent, criticism of Gotthard Gunther's articles. However, we've printed the same basic argument in other criticisms. Anyone interested in joining the Boise Rocket Research Society can contact the secretary, Gary L. Bennett at 1301 North 14th Street, Boise, Idaho.

Keep your eyes peeled for a soft-cover science fiction novel put out by Popular Library—THE NAKED AND THE DAMNED, by Robert Shafer. Originally called THE CONQUERED PLACE, it received fine reviews in the newspapers, and this editor believes it's one of the best he's read.

That's about it for now.

—THE EDITOR.

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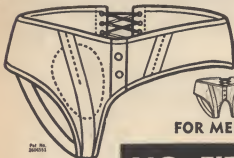
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Don't jump at conclusions. I'm not a manufacturer of any fancy new lure. I have no rods or lines to sell. I'm a professional man and make a good living in my profession. But my all-absorbing hobby is fishing. And, quite by accident, I've discovered how to go to waters that everyone else says are fished out and come in with a limit catch of the biggest bass that you ever saw. The savage old bass that got so big, because they were "wise" to every ordinary way of fishing.

This METHOD is NOT spinning, trolling, casting, fly fishing, trot line fishing, set line fishing, hand line fishing, live bait fishing, jugging, netting, trapping, seining, and does not even faintly resemble any of these stonagard methods of fishing. No live bait or prepared bait is used. You can carry all of the equipment you need in one hand.

The whole method can be learned in twenty minutes—twenty minutes of fascinating reading. All the extra equipment you need, you can buy locally at a cost of less than a dollar. Yet with it, you can come in after an hour or two of the greatest excitement of your life, with a stringer full. Not one or two miserable 12 or 14 inch over-sized keepers—but five or six real beauties with real poundage behind them. The kind that don't need a word of explanation of the professional skill of the man who caught them. Absolutely legal, too—in every state.

This amazing method was developed by a little group of professional fishermen. Though they are public guides, they never divulge their method to their patrons. They use it only when fishing for their own tables. No man on your waters has ever seen it, ever heard of it, or ever used it. And when you have given it the first trial, you will be as closed-mouthed as a man who has suddenly discovered a gold mine. Because with this method you can fish with-in a hundred feet of the best fishermen in the county and pull in ferocious big ones while they come home empty handed. No special skill is required. The method is just as deadly in the hands of a novice as in the hands of an old timer. My method will be disclosed only to those few men in each area—men who will give me their word of honor not to give the method to anyone else.

Send me your name. Let me tell you how you can try out this deadly method of bringing in big-bass from your "fished out" waters. Let me tell you why I let you try out my unusual method without risking a penny of your money on instructions or lures. There is no charge for this information, now or at any other time. Just your name is all I need. But I guarantee that the information I send you will make you a complete skeptic—until once you try it! And then, your own catches will fill you with disbelief. Send your name, today. This will be fun.

ERIK R. FARE Libertyville 9, Illinois

Erik R. Fare, Libertyville 9, Illinois

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